

# Developing oral communication and productive thinking skills in HM Prisons

learning  
& skills  
research  
centre

This report examines how **educators and psychologists** seek to foster **positive thinking, learning and behaviour change** in **prisons**.

Part A focuses on the English Speaking Board's oral communication courses, looking at evidence from observations, interviews and feedback, and at participants' reoffending rates.

Part B is a complementary account of desk-based research focusing on cognitive skill development programmes. The authors argue that **prisons should be designed as 'thinking environments'**, and that oral and thinking skills interventions should **continue in the community** after prisoners' release. The report will be of value to **policy-makers, managers, teachers and researchers**.



## **The Learning and Skills Research Centre**

The LSRC is an independent centre for strategic research to inform long-term policy development and to improve practice in post-16 learning. Based at the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), the centre identifies key priorities, commissions major studies and ensures that research findings clearly and usefully inform practitioners, policy-makers and the research community. In recent years, the government has supported the development of evidence-informed policy and the use of research to improve practice. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has established a National Education Research Forum (NERF) and is looking to other sectors, such as health, to see how research can achieve a stronger impact on policy and practice. A number of major research centres that focus on all phases of education have been established by the DfES. The LSRC is the first centre supported by the DfES to focus solely on post-16 learning.

**The Learning and Skills Research Centre  
is supported by the Learning and Skills Council  
and the Department for Education and Skills.  
It is managed by the Learning and Skills  
Development Agency**

Published by the  
Learning and Skills Research Centre  
[www.LSRC.org.uk](http://www.LSRC.org.uk)

LSDA is committed to providing publications  
that are accessible to all. To request additional  
copies of this publication or a different format,  
please contact:

Information Services  
Learning and Skills Research Centre  
Learning and Skills Development Agency  
Regent Arcade House  
19–25 Argyll Street  
London W1F 7LS

Tel 020 7297 9144  
Fax 020 7297 9242  
[enquiries@LSDA.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@LSDA.org.uk)

Registered with the  
Charity Commissioners

Copyedited by Helen Lund  
Designed by sans+baum  
Printed by Blackmore Ltd  
Shaftesbury, Dorset

052285RS/02/06/2000  
ISBN 1 84572 386 4

© Learning and Skills Development Agency  
2006

You are welcome to copy this publication  
for internal use within your organisation.  
Otherwise, no part of this publication may  
be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system  
or transmitted in any form or by any means,  
electronic, electric, chemical, optical,  
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without  
prior written permission of the copyright owner.

#### **Further information**

For further information about the Learning and  
Skills Council, visit: [www.LSC.gov.uk](http://www.LSC.gov.uk)

**This publication results from the Learning  
and Skills Development Agency's strategic  
programme of research and development,  
funded by the Learning and Skills Council,  
the organisation that exists to make England  
better skilled and more competitive.**

## Preface

It is widely recognised that 'joined-up' thinking and service delivery are desirable in the context of the criminal justice system. This system is designed both for retribution and rehabilitation, but those who work within it share the overriding aim of reducing crime. What they are up against are the psychological, social and financial rewards of criminal activity and antisocial cultures which operate through fear and violence.

This report is in two parts. Part A evaluates the English Speaking Board's (ESB) educational courses in oral communication, which have been running in a number of HM Prisons since 1999. The ESB approach is compared with other educational, work-related and psychological interventions which seek to help prisoners to organise and communicate their thoughts.

Part B is an account of work focusing on cognitive skill development programmes carried out at the University of Strathclyde. This desk-based research complements the larger study carried out by researchers from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and the University of Sunderland, despite the fact that the original plan to carry out a case study of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) programme in a Scottish prison could not be taken forward. Kay Livingston and Rebecca Soden argue that we know little about how critical thinking and learner interaction can best be developed so as to realise programme aims.

Both parts of the report examine ways in which educators and psychologists seek to foster positive thinking, learning and behavioural change in prisons. Acknowledging that transfer of knowledge and skills to different contexts is problematical, the authors argue that prisons should be designed as 'thinking environments' and that oral communication and thinking skills interventions need to be continued in the community after prisoners are released.

Other common themes include the importance for learners of motivation, learner interaction, concern for others and formative feedback; and the need for staff to model across disciplines the kind of behaviour they wish to promote.

Policy-makers, managers, teachers and researchers will find in this report useful reviews of research into teaching and learning in prisons, together with new evidence about the value of oral communication and group activity in the rehabilitation of offenders.

**David Moseley**

University of Newcastle upon Tyne



## Foreword

*Please note that publications cited in the foreword are listed in the references section at the end of Part A of this report.*

Addressing the problem of re-offending is a central aim of the government's national strategy against crime. Since 1997, the UK criminal justice and correctional systems have undergone significant change in order to create a more coordinated approach to tackling crime and its causes. The *National reducing re-offending delivery plan* (NOMS 2005) emphasises the need for a comprehensive national strategy across seven 'pathways' which can help to lead offenders out of re-offending. One of these pathways is learning and skills. The government's Green Paper entitled *Reducing re-offending through skills and employment* (DfES/Home Office/DWP 2005) sets out proposals for concerted action to improve offenders' skills and job prospects.

Alongside the development of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), the government is introducing a new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), planned and funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and for the first time, covering offenders in custody *and* in the community. This provides a framework within which to raise and refocus standards in learning and skills, with a strong emphasis on early assessment of needs and good planning of learning in the context of the overall sentence plan. This should underpin better learning and skills outcomes and progression into mainstream opportunities and employment. Increasingly, as the ESB evaluation report (Part A) emphasises, our focus must be on the extent to which improving offenders' skills and raising their prospects of employment can have a positive impact on the incidence of re-offending. Critically, this should benefit not just individual offenders, but also their families, their communities and wider society.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) welcomes research evidence on the impact of oral skills training. Recent research by Davies *et al.* (2004) looked at offenders participating in Think First, Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) and Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) programmes. The research revealed that the sessions frequently demanded listening and speaking skills at Level 2 (GCSE Grades A\*– C) and even at Level 3 (GCE A/AS level or equivalent), despite the fact that 74% of the participating offenders did not have skills at these levels and 35% were judged to have listening/speaking skills below Level 1. Since that report was produced, the National Probation Directorate (NPD) has undertaken work to simplify materials for several programmes (Think First, One-to-One, ETS, Focus on Resettlement and Community Domestic Violence) and produced a guide to supporting the literacy needs of offenders on offending behaviour programmes. The DfES has funded a parallel project to produce listening and speaking guidance materials for all staff working with offenders.

Assessment of oral skills is important. Although most post-16 providers do not routinely assess the listening and speaking skills of first-language speakers, there is evidence from the US (Sticht, Hofstetter and Hofstetter 1999; Sticht 2003) that listening skills provide a powerful indicator of reading potential. For a learner with poor listening skills, a learning programme that focuses only on reading and writing may not be very effective. Sticht concludes that we may need to offer opportunities to develop new vocabulary, content knowledge and oracy skills alongside literacy programmes. The DfES is keen to explore the potential of this approach and intends to develop materials to assess the oral skills of first-language speakers. We hope this will prove to be an exciting new strand of the government's Skills for Life strategy.

**Liz Lawson**

Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit  
DfES



**Part A**

**The impact of ESB oral communication courses in  
HM Prisons – an independent evaluation**

**David Moseley**  
**Jill Clark**  
**Vivienne Baumfield**  
**Elaine Hall**  
**Ian Hall**  
**Jen Miller**

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

**Graham Blench**  
**Maggie Gregson**  
**Trish Spedding**  
University of Sunderland



**University of  
Sunderland**

UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE





## Contents

Acknowledgements

Executive summary

1	<b>Section 1</b>	<b>Introduction: the project in context</b>
5	<b>Section 2</b>	<b>What do prisoners need to learn?</b>
	2.1	The value of learning
	2.2	What works?
	2.3	Psychosocial needs
	2.4	Language and cognitive needs
	2.5	Literacy needs
17	<b>Section 3</b>	<b>How should prisoners be taught?</b>
21	<b>Section 4</b>	<b>Courses provided in HM Prisons</b>
	4.1	Families of programmes
	4.2	Thinking skills interventions in prisons
	4.3	Contextual factors affecting the quality and impact of R&R and ETS programmes
	4.4	The current picture: education and training provision in prisons in England, with special reference to communication and thinking
29	<b>Section 5</b>	<b>Why the ESB's emphasis on oral communication may add value to prison education</b>
35	<b>Section 6</b>	<b>Research questions and methodological issues</b>
	6.1	Our original research plan and research questions
	6.2	Addressing our research questions
	6.3	Doing research in prisons: pitfalls, problems and politics
41	<b>Section 7</b>	<b>How far do thinking skills approaches feature in the courses and training provided in HM Prisons?</b>
	7.1	Results of a questionnaire survey carried out between March and June 2003
45	<b>Section 8</b>	<b>The retrospective study</b>
	8.1	Project samples and national reference group
	8.2	Results
	8.3	Interpretation of results
55	<b>Section 9</b>	<b>The prospective study</b>
61	<b>Section 10</b>	<b>The case studies</b>
	10.1	Introduction
	10.2	Key findings: ESB Oral Communication Level 1
	10.3	Key findings: English Language
	10.4	Key findings: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
	10.5	Key findings: Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS)
	10.6	Discussion

69	<b>Section 11</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
	11.1	The survey
	11.2	The retrospective study
	11.3	The prospective study
	11.4	The case studies
	11.5	Some implications for the rehabilitation of offenders
75	<b>Section 12</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
79	<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>Case study at HMP Millwood: ESB Oral Communication Course Level 1</b>
87	<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>Summarised results of the 2003 postal survey, showing which types of course are thought to develop thinking skills</b>
90	<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>A list of project topics chosen by candidates in the prospective study</b>
91	<b>Appendix 4</b>	<b>A telephone interview with one of the ESB tutors at HMP Grangehurst</b>
93		References

## Tables

27	<b>1</b>	Prison education and training provision
39	<b>2</b>	Reasons for non-participation in the prospective study
41	<b>3</b>	Types of course thought to develop thinking skills, with varying degrees of emphasis
42	<b>4</b>	A-rated courses receiving 10 or more mentions
42	<b>5</b>	B-rated courses receiving 10 or more mentions
42	<b>6</b>	C-rated courses receiving 10 or more mentions
46	<b>7</b>	Courses taken by members of the control group
47	<b>8</b>	ESB and control group samples and national population (males) compared by age
48	<b>9</b>	ESB and control groups and national population (males) compared by type of offence
48	<b>10</b>	ESB and control groups and national population (males) compared by number of previous convictions
56	<b>11</b>	Distribution of responses to 15 ELQ items, ranked in order of positivity
80	<b>12</b>	ESB qualifications gained at HMP Millwood 2001–2004
87	<b>13</b>	A-rated courses, where the primary aim is to develop thinking
88	<b>14</b>	B-rated courses, which aim to develop transferable skills
89	<b>15</b>	C-rated courses, where thinking skills are required



## Acknowledgements

We should like to thank Maggie Greenwood, LSDA Head of Research, for her patience and support throughout. Members of the project steering group – Peter Blunt (Strode College), Diane Hunt, Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Liz Lawson, Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) and John Vorhaus, National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) – have provided much useful help and guidance. Belinda Singleton and Marjorie Walker of the English Speaking Board (ESB) provided background information and continuing encouragement. Professor Julian Elliott (University of Durham) provided useful feedback on drafts, as a critical friend.

Andrew Kalinsky, Rachel Councell and Mark Judd at RDS NOMS – part of the Research Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) at the Home Office which leads on research and analysis for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) – spent a considerable amount of time responding to queries and interrogating databases to provide us with re-conviction data.

We are indebted to all prison staff – governors, heads of learning and skills, education managers, teachers and prison officers – who contributed to data collection in various ways. Finally, we acknowledge the help of prisoners themselves, for agreeing to meet with us and complete questionnaires.





## Executive summary

### Introduction

This document reports on a research project, funded by the Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC), which evaluates the impact of English Speaking Board (ESB) oral communication courses in prisons in England. There is a strong emphasis on strategic and reflective thinking in these courses, together with a focus on discussion and feedback within a supportive group. In order to contextualise ESB oral communication courses, we built up a picture of the diversity of interventions which seek to improve the thinking and communication skills of prisoners. Our first impression was that ESB oral communication courses are challenging and often emotionally powerful for participants. It seemed possible that these courses, especially those with a vocational component, may help to reduce recidivism by opening up alternative life trajectories, including employment options. Because the opportunity to make use of improved oral communication in other contexts is immediately available to course members, we also wanted to find out if other tutors and prison officers could see an improvement.

### Context

This project was carried out at a time of increasing government support for prison education, as part of its Skills for Life strategy. However, it was not possible for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) or the Prison Service to ground policy in research evidence about the rehabilitative value of prison education and training in the UK, since there is no such evidence base.

Psychological thinking skills interventions in the UK focus on offending behaviour and use a cognitive-behavioural approach first developed in Canada. The evidence base for these interventions now appears less secure than it did in 2003.

International research tells us that educational, vocational and psychological interventions can all help to reduce recidivism. The evidence suggests that it is important for rehabilitation programmes to create a communal spirit among learners that is strong enough to support further progress after discharge.

Between 1999 and 2002, 28 prisons entered 1,137 candidates for external assessment in oral communication by ESB examiners. This presented an opportunity to carry out a study of the re-conviction rates of discharged prisoners with ESB qualifications. When the project began (in 2003), this was probably the first UK study to look at recidivism outcomes in relation to a specific educational course.

## Research methods

The team adopted a multi-method approach and collected data from a wide range of sources within the different phases of the research. The project was grounded in a review of research evidence on the impact of educational, psychological and vocational aspects of rehabilitation, especially those with a thinking skills emphasis. In order to contextualise our evaluation of ESB oral communication courses (which in our view have a strong thinking skills emphasis), we first carried out a *postal survey* in prisons in England and Wales to find out which courses are believed by prison staff to be helpful in developing thinking skills.

Our subsequent evaluation of ESB oral communication courses had three main empirical components.

- A *retrospective study* was carried out to evaluate the impact on recidivism (if any) of taking an ESB oral communication course. This phase of the research aimed to answer the research question: *did discharged prisoners who successfully completed ESB courses between 1999 and 2003 have a lower re-conviction rate than expected?* The design of the retrospective study made it possible to compare re-conviction rates of an ESB group with a control group, as well as to compare both with national statistics.
- A *prospective experimental study* was carried out to address the research question: *after successfully completing ESB courses, are prisoners able to communicate better with fellow inmates and prison staff?*
- Four *case studies* were completed, using qualitative methods, to compare different approaches to the development of thinking skills and to address the research question: *what are the distinctive features of ESB courses compared with other courses which make significant demands on thinking?*

## Research findings

The survey asked respondents to list courses in their institution which they believed were effective in extending prisoners' thinking skills, and then to rate them for their emphasis on thinking. A total of 503 courses/activities were identified by respondents. Almost one third of all courses mentioned were thought to have the development of thinking as their primary aim. While 57% of psychological courses mentioned were seen as being primarily about thinking, this was also true of 17% of the educational courses. A major aim of both educational and work-based vocational courses was thought to be the development of transferable skills.

The ESB project sample in our re-conviction study comprised 211 prisoners from four prisons (195 men and 16 women) who are known to have been re-convicted (or not) in the first 12 months after release. A local control group of 155 men was obtained by identifying all prisoners who began an education course during sentences being served in 2001 and 2002, but who did not take an ESB qualification before being released.

Prisoners who successfully completed ESB courses between 1999 and 2003 had much lower re-conviction rates than expected – but did no better than control group prisoner learners who took other education courses.

We found that the 1-year re-conviction rate of prisoners who took ESB courses was less than half the national average (21% as against 44% nationally). The corresponding figure for the control group was 28%, but when differences in offence categories, number of previous court appearances and sentence length were taken into account, the figures for both samples were identical. Overall, the 1-year re-conviction figures for the experimental and control groups combined represent a highly significant 45% reduction in re-convictions compared with national statistics – a difference which cannot be explained by sampling factors.

Our main finding is that some prisons do very much better than others in terms of recidivism. The quality of the education and training provided and their openness to innovation help to explain why the prisons taking part in our study did particularly well.

From this phase of the study, we were unable to determine to what extent ESB oral communication courses contributed to the positive outcomes we found, but there is some evidence to suggest that they may be especially beneficial for certain groups with a high risk of re-conviction (ie repeat offenders and those with shorter sentences).

After successfully completing ESB courses, prisoners communicate more effectively with fellow inmates and prison staff.

Although this finding is based on only two classes in one prison, it was statistically significant and is supported by the fact that we were able to predict from prior attitude data which prisoners would do best (a) in the end-of-course examination and (b) in terms of improved ratings of communicative competence by prison staff.

Questionnaire and rating-scale evidence showed that these prisoner learners had very positive attitudes towards learning and at the end of the course were highly rated for 'control of temper' and 'thinking before acting or speaking'. Post-course feedback showed that they greatly valued (a) the opportunities afforded by the course to develop and demonstrate competence, (b) the autonomy they had exercised under guidance and (c) the relatedness (sense of connection with other group members) which they had experienced through group interaction and support.

ESB courses are of high quality in many respects when compared with other courses which make significant demands on thinking. They have a holistic character, build on the personal interests and experience of learners, require learners to take responsibility for choices and offer a high level of social support. They provide formative feedback as well as personal interaction with an external examiner.

The evidence we collected through case study observation, discussion with teachers and learners and perusal of a large number of course feedback forms supports the qualitative summary above. The quotations provided in this report illustrate how ESB courses meet a wide range of learner needs. Of course, much depends on the skills of the ESB-trained tutors in building up trust and confidence, as well as on course structure and teaching style. The most salient themes coming through from course members are improving one's own learning and skills and working with others (relatedness and cooperation). The concentration on group work in the form of trust-building icebreakers in the early sessions was widely appreciated.

## **Conclusions**

- The most important conclusions drawn from this research project are as follows.
- Education in prisons can really make a difference, both in the short term and by opening up alternatives to a criminal career.
- There are almost certainly big differences between prisons in the quality of education provided.
- The ESB approach to developing communication skills is effective in meeting the needs of learners for competence, autonomy and relatedness.

## **Recommendations**

- We make recommendations for policy and practice, staff training and research. The most important of these are listed below. The first set of five is specific to ESB oral communication courses, while the second set of five deals more broadly with oral communication and thinking. These are followed by two recommendations for staff training and four for research.
- All prisoners should have access either to ESB oral communication courses or to courses with similar components.
- Accredited ESB courses should be made available more widely in community settings, where they may help to engage disaffected young people in learning and enable prisoners to progress to higher levels after release.
- Initial assessment of oral communication should be formative in nature and should be based on performance in a range of familiar settings.
- All courses should discuss how to use and build on improved communication skills in different contexts (including the prison environment).
- The ESB should mount a publicity campaign so that more employers and community agencies appreciate the value of qualifications in oral communication.
- The development of oral communication skills should be given greater prominence in relation to written communication skills in a wide range of accredited courses for adult learners.

- For prisoners with low levels of prior attainment, oral communication should be seen as an essential part of the learning journey, not as an 'add-on'.
- More use should be made of group work and peer support methods in the education and training of offenders.
- Greater use should be made in the education and training of offenders of learning through enquiry, including collaborative research and discussion.
- The development of thinking skills within and across subject areas should become an explicit goal in prison education and training, and should feature strongly in individual learning plans (ILPs).
- Oral communication and group work should be part of a common core of experiential initial training which is shared by prison educators, mental health workers, prison officers, psychologists and trainers.
- Active learning approaches to professional development should be encouraged, including action research, practitioner-led seminars, coaching, drama and group work.
- Pilot projects should be set up in which ESB oral communication courses are made a sentence plan requirement for certain groups with a high risk of reoffending; for example, prisoners with short sentences.
- Research should be undertaken to find out whether ESB courses, especially those with a vocational aspect, help prisoners to gain and keep employment.
- A research project should be set up to evaluate learner-centred approaches to literacy instruction which build on oral communication and personal interests.
- Research should be carried out to find out which (if any) quality indicators in education and training – for example, personalisation, interpersonal regard, group activity, productive thinking and the principles of andragogy (see Section 3) – predict positive outcomes for offenders.

We also endorse recommendations from three influential reports which are relevant to the issues addressed here and support the arguments we have made. These are not duplicated here, but are included at the end of Section 12.



**Section 1****Introduction: the project in context**

One of the recommendations made by the Prison Reform Trust in a report entitled *Time to learn: prisoners' views on prison education* (2003: 70) is that 'the concept of the prison as a learning environment for prisoners and staff should be the subject for further research and development'. Yet many prisoners perceive their environment as 'a place of danger, exposing them to the risks of being physically harmed, wronged, exploited, intimidated or bullied' (Edgar and Martin 2000). One ex-prisoner claims that 'the aimless institutional living that prisoners experience, far from "working" when sentences end, is actually dehumanising many men and women, who land back in the outside world less able to lead useful, law-abiding lives than before they went in' (Bennett 2004: 29). Learning, skills transfer, relaxed communication and 'joined-up thinking' become very difficult where there are high levels of anxiety and staff turnover, as well as many institutional barriers to the rehabilitation of prisoners and to the development of professional synergy.

The House of Commons Education and Skills Committee report on prison education (HoC ESC 2005) calls for an effective overarching strategy for the rehabilitation of prisoners, in which meeting personal needs and entitlement to education are core components. It also claims that 'basic skills are not sufficient to enable prisoners to improve their employability in isolation of broader learning including soft skills, and that such a concentrated focus has narrowed the curriculum to the detriment of the learners' (2005: 6). The committee calls for greater breadth and flexibility and strongly reinforces the set of 32 recommendations made by the Prison Reform Trust (2003).

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has been given responsibility for the funding, planning and delivery of prison education in three pilot areas in 2005 and will be fully in charge from 2006. It faces many challenges in seeking to improve practice and will need to consult extensively and continuously with all stakeholders, especially with teachers and learners. According to the Prison Reform Trust (2003), the humane ethos found in education departments, the motivating influence of tutors and opportunities for personal development, notably through the creative arts, are all highly valued by prisoners. Opportunities now exist to formulate policy and develop practice based on humanistic values, well-founded theories of learning and teaching and empirical evidence about effective practice.

Because learning is an active process, it involves thinking and feeling; and insofar as it is participatory, it involves communication. Before working on the present evaluation project, five of the authors were involved in an evaluation for the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) of the theoretical and pedagogical understandings of learning which are relevant to the post-16 sector (Coffield *et al.* 2004a, 2004b; Moseley *et al.* 2004). We believe it to be especially important for developments in learning in prisons to be informed by sound principles and by research evidence. It seemed to us that the oral communication courses and qualifications provided by the ESB incorporate many of the principles and practices for which there is considerable support in the literature (including ways of engaging learners and meeting their social and emotional as well as cognitive needs). We therefore saw the present evaluation as an opportunity to apply and extend our earlier work by carrying out an empirical study in the challenging context of prisoner education.

Our starting point was an end-of-project report on innovative work in prisons by the ESB (2002a). Feedback from prisoners who had successfully completed ESB oral communication courses showed that the experience of planning, presenting and discussing a topic of personal interest within a supportive group was both challenging and empowering. Prisoners could also see the relevance and personal benefits of improved oral communication.

We developed a research proposal with the following aims:

- to find out how far thinking skills approaches feature in the courses and training provided in HM Prisons in England and Wales
- to find out what teachers and learners see as the beneficial and distinctive features of ESB oral communication courses
- to find out whether prisoners taking ESB courses become more skilled in oral communication outside the classroom
- to compare re-conviction outcomes for prisoners who completed ESB courses with those of other prisoners with similar characteristics who took other courses run by a prison education department
- to make recommendations for policy, practice and further research, informed by evidence about ‘what works’ for prisoners in the area of learning and skills.

A more detailed rationale for the project’s focus on oral communication is provided later in Section 5.



Our original project aims had to be scaled down after we came to realise that there is not an established culture of enquiry, research and reflective practice about learning and teaching in prisons. We found that collaboration across professional boundaries through practice-based research (involving, for example, education staff, psychologists and prison officers) also tends to be unfamiliar territory for prison personnel. However, we were able to maintain our focus on the evaluation of ESB oral communication courses, locating this ESB initiative within the broader context of thinking and learning in prisons. Our enquiry has been informed by what we know about thinking skills approaches, since there is evidence that these are likely to engage learners in ways which promote positive personal and social change (Higgins *et al.* 2004; Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood 2004).



**Section 2****What do prisoners need to learn?****2.1****The value of learning**

The concept of a 'learning society' raises fundamental issues of human rights and is based upon widespread acceptance of the notion of access to education for all and a culture of lifelong learning. From a psychological perspective, learning depends on motivation and interest, which in turn depend on the satisfaction of basic human needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan 1995; Krapp 2005).

Since Plato first identified education as a political activity, authors across the disciplines of psychology, philosophy, sociology and anthropology (see eg Dewey 1933; Vygotsky 1978; Geertz 2000) have pointed to the ways in which educational and political systems are inextricably linked and argued that their power to liberate or enslave, to civilise or brutalise is forged from dominant visions of the relationship between human minds and human societies.

For over 100 years, prison systems on both sides of the Atlantic have been developing prisoner programmes that aim to rehabilitate prisoners into society. The learning processes involved have been seen as valuable both for the individuals concerned and for society as a whole. Yet research and policy has often concentrated on attempts to change individuals rather than on attempts to deal with the strongly linked societal factors of crime and unemployment simultaneously.

Research evidence, some of which is summarised below, suggests that programmes which provide inmates with skills and qualifications valued by employers have been shown to be moderately effective. Other programmes, such as non-directive counselling and interventions which focus on discipline, structure, challenge and self-esteem are generally ineffective. Ineffective programmes tend not to be directly associated either with criminal behaviour or with the social contexts in which it occurs (Sherman *et al.* 1998).

**2.2****What works?**

In 1974, Martinson published an analysis of re-conviction rates of prisoners who had undergone rehabilitation schemes. In his report, he concluded that, overall, correctional treatments had no appreciable effect on re-conviction rates. Martinson (1974) found the idea that 'nothing works' an appealing one as it supported his conviction that imprisonment proved counterproductive in reducing criminality. It later turned out that one explanation for his overall finding is that substantial numbers of correctional treatments have negative outcomes. Lipsey (1992) found, for example, that deterrence programmes actually increase recidivism by 24%. Yet by 1992, the damage was done, as the views of liberals like Martinson had been overtaken by conservatives who used his report to insist on longer and more punitive regimes.

Martinson's report had an almost immediate impact on prison systems – on the grounds that if nothing works, why keep trying? In many Western countries, prison regimes cut their education and psychological support services or dispensed with them altogether. However, there was one country where 'nothing works' failed to become the accepted view – Canada. A group of psychologists convinced the authorities there to adhere to the rehabilitative ideal, believing that criminal behaviour, like almost all forms of social behaviour, is largely learnt and can, therefore, be modified. Gendreau and Ross (1983) re-examined Martinson's original data and concluded that his findings had been erroneously presented, and that in fact almost half of the programmes studied had reduced recidivism. Gendreau and his colleagues developed new programmes, methodically evaluating their impact on criminal behaviour, moving from a paradigm of 'nothing works' to 'what works'. Their findings indicated that the most successful programmes (including those that deal with anger management) were grounded in the cognitive-behavioural school of psychology. Many of the 'thinking skills' programmes now in use in UK prisons emanate from the work of this group of Canadian psychologists.

Friendship *et al.* (2003) illustrate how the body of research initiated by Gendreau and collectively known as 'what works' research led in the mid- and late 1990s to the development of a 'strong treatment ethic' within the criminal justice system in the UK. This growing international body of literature suggests that specific multi-modal cognitive-behavioural programmes are effective. The most well-developed and popular of these is the Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) programme (also known as Cognitive Skills) which was first used by Correctional Service Canada (CSC) but has since been used more widely in a number of countries including the UK and the US.

Robinson and Porporino (2001) summarised many of the relevant 'what works' studies of offenders who completed the R&R programme between 1989 and 1994. They describe how one thinking skills intervention involving a sample of over 4000 Canadian offenders resulted in a reduction in re-conviction rates of 5 percentage points or 20.5%.<sup>1</sup> A version of an R&R programme known as Straight Thinking on Probation (STOP) was evaluated in a British setting by Raynor and Vanstone (1996). Participants showed a 7 percentage point or 17% reduction in re-conviction in the first year after release, although this advantage was not sustained in 2-year and 5-year follow-up studies. HM Prison Service in England and Wales started to run cognitive skills programmes in 10 prison establishments in 1992, using an in-house version of R&R, initially under the banner of Thinking Skills and then (from 1993) as Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS).

1 Throughout this report, the same convention for reporting reductions in re-conviction rates is used, with the predicted or comparison re-conviction rate being regarded as 100%. Thus a re-conviction rate of 25% in an experimental group, compared with 35% in a control group, is a 29% reduction.

Friendship *et al.* (2003) carried out a retrospective quasi-experimental study which consisted of a treatment group (n=667) of adult male offenders who had voluntarily participated in a cognitive skills programme between 1992 and 1996. This group, which included 66 inmates (10%) who began but did not complete the programme, was compared with a matched comparison group whose members received no treatment (n=1801). Although the overall reduction in re-conviction within 2 years of release was only 6%, it was 44% lower than the comparison group for medium-low risk offenders and 20% lower for medium-high risk offenders. On this basis, the authors claimed that the chances of being re-convicted within 2 years could be reduced by 55% for R&R participants and 52% for ETS participants.

However, two other very substantial UK studies published in the same year by the same Home Office research team (Cann *et al.* 2003; Falshaw *et al.* 2003) found no significant difference in 2-year re-conviction rates for prisoners who had participated in cognitive skills programmes, when compared with matched groups over the periods 1996–1998 and 1998–2000 respectively. In the second of these studies, this conclusion held (for both R&R and ETS) even when poor-quality programme delivery and programme ‘drop-out’ were excluded as possible explanatory factors. Falshaw *et al.* (2003) speculated that the motivation of prisoners may have become more ‘instrumental’ after 1996, as they were made aware that attending a cognitive treatment programme could help to reduce their time in prison. The authors also point to the very rapid concurrent expansion in programme delivery and suggest that this may have adversely affected the motivation of staff.

Although carried out in a probation context, rather than in prisons, the evaluation of R&R by Wilkinson (2005) also failed to show a significant difference in re-convictions over a 2-year period either for those who started (n=105) or for those who completed the programme (n=43). In this case, the comparison group had been recommended for R&R, but courts had disposed of them in other ways (such as remanding them in custody for other offences). One unexpected finding was that positive changes in attitude were associated with poor outcomes. This not only leads one to question the basis on which candidates are selected for the programme, but also the idea of trying to bring about positive changes in how people think without also providing support for later behavioural change.

There is a growing recognition that cognitive-behavioural psychology does not hold all the answers to the rehabilitation of prisoners. There is also a substantial body of evidence that both educational and vocational programmes can help to reduce recidivism. The value of humanistic liberal arts study in promoting moral and cognitive development lies behind some of these programmes. Teachers, instructors and prison officers have also made productive use of the social power of thinking and working collaboratively in groups, especially where a 'therapeutic community' has been set up.

Pawson (2000) suggested that the rehabilitative outcome of prisoner education stems from improved competence (including areas such as social skills and reflection). Educational experiences can help to build character and raise self-confidence and aspirations. Pawson summarised the benefits of the University of Victoria/Simon Fraser University Prison Education Programme in British Columbia, Canada where 654 participants, working successfully at or beyond university entrance level for at least 8 months, had a 3-year recidivism (re-incarceration) rate of 25% instead of a predicted 42% (a massive 40% improvement). Pawson also addressed the important issues of why the programme was effective, for whom and in what circumstances.

Clear and detailed answers to these questions are to be found in the final project report by Duguid (1998). The programme was effective because it was freely chosen; required sustained commitment; created democratic, participatory university-oriented communities; enabled students to consider critically human values and goals; and provided practical support in the community for those who chose to build on their learning after discharge. It was effective for prisoners in all risk categories, but especially for those in the lower categories. It was more effective with violent offenders (who showed a mean reduction in recidivism of 70%) than with those imprisoned for breaking and entering or robbery (only 9%). Those under 21 and over 30 when convicted had the best outcomes, but for all subgroups, successful participation in further education courses after discharge was a highly positive indicator. Even young men convicted of breaking and entering or robbery and high-risk prisoners in their 20s who pursued further education after release did much better than predicted, their respective reoffending rates being 53% and 47% below predicted levels. For most subgroups, measures of intense involvement in the programmes (including extra-curricular drama activities and employment in schools) were also positive indicators, especially for violent offenders and 'second-chancers' (ie men in their 20s who had dropped out of high school).

Although the Victoria/Simon Fraser study has been criticised for not fully controlling for self-selection effects, it remains one of the most encouraging pieces of evidence for the value of education in the rehabilitation of prisoners. It made use of a well-established prediction instrument, the SIR (Statistical Index on Recidivism) (Nuffield 1982). One piece of evidence concerned 213 men who went on to complete further education courses after release; the study found that only 13% went back to prison within 3 years, compared with a predicted 39%. This alone is a strong argument for a 'joined-up' approach to enabling prisoners to succeed in education through liberal arts and social science courses which seek to develop critical thinking. However, as Duguid (1998: 53) pointed out: '...it is not programs which work, but their capacity to offer resources which allow subjects the choice of making them work ... For men with virtually no institutional ties beyond the criminal subculture and family connections shattered by prolonged periods in prison, the link with educational institutions may offer an essential bridge between the carceral world and the world of citizens'.

The Victoria/Simon Fraser programme ran for 20 years, with university staff providing higher education (HE), high-school equivalency and university preparatory courses in four prisons for some 2000 prisoners, but in 1993, funding was cut. This was before any substantial evaluation had been carried out and happened at the very same time that the pendulum was swinging towards more prescriptive cognitive-behavioural interventions, based on a model of diagnosable criminogenic needs.

Lipsey's (1992) meta-analysis of 443 intervention studies excluded educational interventions that were not explicitly targeted at reducing re-offending, but it remains influential, since it showed an overall mean 10% reduction in recidivism. Lipsey found that employment-related courses were highly effective (a 36% reduction), followed by 'multimodal' and behavioural psychological interventions at 24%; skill-oriented programmes also did well at 20%.

In their meta-analysis of correction-based programmes for adult offenders in the US, Wilson, Gallagher and MacKenzie (2000) confirmed that education courses can also be very effective, with post-secondary-level education courses associated with a 26% reduction in recidivism and other education courses (including adult basic education) coming in at 18%. Wilson, Gallagher and MacKenzie also studied employment status after release and calculated that 38% of the reduced recidivism effect could be attributed to the impact of course attendance on employment. On average, educational, vocational and work programmes had the effect of more than doubling the odds that a programme participant would be employed at the follow-up stage, compared to a non-participant. Wilson, Gallagher and MacKenzie provided an interesting discussion of their results, suggesting that 'the critical element may be the commitment of the individual to a conventional activity perceived by the inmate as a move away from a life of crime' (2000: 364). They recommended that future evaluation research could be strengthened through the incorporation of theoretical links between programme activities and future criminal involvement and through designs that control for self-selection bias beyond basic demographic differences.

Here in the UK, an unpublished study carried out on behalf of HM Prison Service (Clark 2001) is cited in an influential report (SEU 2002) as showing that simply taking part in education or training while in prison is strongly associated with lower re-conviction rates. Contact was made with Danny Clark, who kindly made more information available to our research team. Clark's study comprised 319 male prisoners, 72 (23%) of whom had attended education or vocational training courses while in prison, while the rest had not. It was found that 24% of the former group and 33% of the latter group were re-convicted within 1 year of release (a statistically significant difference at the 5% level, representing a 30% reduction in re-convictions). It is, of course, probable that a selection effect and other unexamined differences between the two groups contribute to this apparent benefit, but a second comparison throws more light on what was happening. A needs assessment had been carried out on all the men using a Canadian instrument, the Level of Service Inventory (LSI). In a group of 116 prisoners with identified needs for education and/or training, 41 received some education or training and 75 did not. In the first group, only 17% were re-convicted within a year of release, compared with 47% in the second group. This is a highly significant difference in percentages ( $p < 0.001$ ) and suggests that not meeting the needs of individual learners can have negative results, while meeting acknowledged learning needs is beneficial.



The belief that rehabilitation is a holistic socially supported process which involves the formation of new affiliations and a re-created sense of self has led to the establishment of intensive 'therapeutic communities' in some UK prisons. These are of two types: 'democratic' and 'concept', with the latter focusing on drug-related problems and tending to be more hierarchical. In both cases, inmates live and work together in groups and there is an emphasis on problem solving through group discussion. However, research evaluations of the long-established 'democratic' therapeutic community at HMP Grendon have not been very encouraging. Robertson and Gunn (1987) found no difference in rates of recidivism between ex-Grendon inmates and matched controls, while Marshall (1997) and Taylor (2000) found only marginally lower rates of re-conviction for prisoners who went to HMP Grendon than for those on 'waiting lists' who did not go there. The difference was only about 10% and was not statistically significant when criminal history was controlled.

In 'concept' therapeutic communities, substance misuse is viewed as a symptom of an individual's problematic personality and socialisation. Via social interaction with other group members, prisoners learn new ways to view themselves and how to operate in society. There has been no evaluation in the UK of the impact of concept therapeutic communities on recidivism, but in a randomised controlled trial at Donovan prison in San Diego in the US, Wexler *et al.* (1999) found a 27% lower re-incarceration rate at 2 years after release for those who completed the therapeutic prison regime; and a 79% lower rate for those who also completed prison aftercare in a residential setting. Just as in the University of Victoria/Simon Fraser evaluation, this finding suggests that more support needs to be given for continued voluntary involvement in a 'learning community' after the point of discharge from prison.

---

## 2.3

### Psychosocial needs

According to Kiser (1987), many inmates in US prisons lack the social skills which are conducive to success in the classroom:

*They are willing to interrupt one another and the teacher; have a short attention span; are nervous, withdrawn, defensive, or loud-mouthed; wander in and out of class at will; fail to report promptly to class; talk to one another instead of participating in the group effort; express arch disapproval of one another in class; and engage in power plays and disruptive behaviour in the classroom to enhance their sense of freedom and importance.*

Although the situation may well be more positive in British prisons, we have to remember that earlier in their lives, many prisoners have been excluded from school for the kind of behaviour described by Kiser. Others have simply dropped out of school and have been drawn into crime through the influence of gangs and drug dealers. Many have experienced poverty and/or family breakdown and over a quarter of them have spent some time in care as children (SEU 2002). Hostility to authority figures and lack of trust in them are defining characteristics of disaffected young people. Hurry *et al.* (2005: 8), reporting on basic skills classes for disaffected young people in custody and in the community in England and Wales say that 'even with groups of six or eight, it was hard for the teacher to maintain control'.

Together with studies of violence in prisons (eg Edgar, O'Donnell and Martin 2002) and work on restorative justice, the fact that many prisons offer social skills and life skills courses shows that there is an overwhelming need for those involved in crime to develop prosocial attitudes and behaviour. Controlling antisocial impulses – for example, through anger management – is an important part of this process (Dowden, Blanchette and Serin 1999), but it is equally important for prisoners to understand and respect other people's thoughts and feelings and to develop cooperative ways of living and learning. Opportunities to develop emotional and social 'intelligence' are needed in the kind of safe environment offered through group work, discussion and engagement in the creative arts.

Prisoners are rarely equipped with the skills which employers value highly, namely oral communication and interpersonal skills (Hall *et al.* 1999). Pumphrey and Slater (2002: 9) concluded that 'the ability to multi-task, show initiative and flexibility, effectively organise workloads and take responsibility for personal development are central skills for today's employee. Generic skills are strongly associated with skills gaps, in particular with communication, team working and customer handling.' The National Employers Skills Survey carried out in 2003 yielded the same findings, drawing attention to a lack of motivation on the part of employees as the second most common reason for skill deficits (Hogarth *et al.* 2004).

Newman, Lewis and Beverstock (1993: 7) wrote about the 'right kind' of education in US correctional facilities, and took it to include:

- moral education
- democratic self-rule in the 'just community'
- instruction in the humanities, with a strong cognitive emphasis
- training in a variety of skills to enable the inmate to cope with the personal, sexual, familial, chemical, economic, vocational and social problems of life, thereby gaining a realistic sense of one's individual worth as a human being.

Townsend (1991: 2) argued that prison education needs to be more closely integrated with programmes on social skills, substance abuse, anger management and family violence. The Prison Reform Trust researchers (2003: 36, 68) make the same point, claiming that offending behaviour programmes are often viewed by prisoners as part of their education and recommending that they should be included in a 'learning passport'.

---

## 2.4

### Language and cognitive needs

Very little is known about the communicative competence of adult prisoners, since until recently, this was not routinely assessed in the UK education system (except for pupils whose first language was not English). Ethnic minority groups make up 18% of the male and 25% of the female prison population and 8% of the prison population are foreign nationals. It is not unusual for prison inspection reports to draw attention to the need to provide more support for inmates who do not understand English, but they rarely refer to the listening and speaking skills of those with English as their first language.

Naturally, there is a wide variation in language and verbal reasoning ability among prison inmates, but the distribution is negatively skewed, with a high percentage at the lower end of the ability scale; where tests of adult intelligence have been administered, the mean has been found to be at least one standard deviation below average (Bell *et al.* 1983; Dyslexia Institute 2005). It is not known to what extent this can be attributed to environmental and cultural factors. However, there is research evidence to show that the measured intelligence of pupils who fall behind on literacy measures during the primary school years declines by a similar amount by the time they leave primary school (Whyte 1993).

Ross, Fabiano and Ross (who devised the R&R cognitive programme) found (1988: 45) that many offenders have failed to develop critical reasoning skills.

*Although [offenders] often are able to rationalize their anti-social behavior[,] the reasoning they use in doing so is frequently simplistic and illogical. Their thinking is often exceptionally shallow and narrow; they construe their world in absolute terms, failing to appreciate the subtleties and complexities of social interactions. Their thinking is concrete, rigid, uncreative and maladaptive. Many fail to consider that their thinking, their behavior, and their attitudes contribute to the problems they experience... They simply have not acquired an adequate repertoire of reasoning or problem-solving skills which would enable them to respond in alternative ways to interpersonal and economic problems.*

Cognitive-behavioural approaches to rehabilitation are sometimes associated with a deficit model of cognitive and metacognitive functioning. Many prisoners undoubtedly feel that their lives are out of control and have given up on constructive ways of reflecting on their past and planning their futures. However, it is unhelpful if tutors give the impression that prisoners are incapable of rational and productive thought.

There is a wealth of empirical evidence that educational interventions are especially effective if they emphasise strategic and reflective thinking supported by personal beliefs and values, with learners taking more and more responsibility for directing their own learning (Pintrich 2000; Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood 2004; Moseley *et al.* 2004). Adult learners need to feel that education is empowering, not just something that is 'delivered' or 'done to' them. If we are serious about more adults (including prisoners) gaining access to higher education, we need to prepare them for the cognitive demands of study at university level.

---

## **2.5**

### **Literacy needs**

Using a Sixth-Grade level (11–12 years) as the standard for literacy, 50% of the adult inmates in US prisons are illiterate, which is approximately three times as many as in the general population (Ryan 1991). In the UK, in 2000/01, 76.5% of prisoners were reading at or below Level 1 when discharged (the level an average 11 year old is expected to reach) (HM Prison Service 2002).

Newman, Lewis and Beverstock (1993) cite several studies which reveal low-level literacy among recidivists. Although recidivists have the same general intelligence level as non-recidivists, they obtain lower scores in reading and arithmetic. Exceptionally low reading scores also predict habitual recidivism.

The Dyslexia Institute (2005) gave standardised tests of reading and spelling to a representative prison population in Yorkshire & Humberside and found that about 40% scored at or under one standard deviation below the mean in reading; 67% scored at or under one standard deviation below the mean in spelling. The authors believe that at least 14% of prisoners are dyslexic, but this claim is based on controversial psychometric criteria which have been rejected by the members of a British Psychological Society working party (Reason *et al.* 1999). What is clear from this carefully executed study is that a large percentage of the prison population have problems with reading and writing which are likely to limit learning and work opportunities.

A rather different picture was painted by Rice, Howes and Connell (1998) who claimed that the reading and spelling performance of prisoners simply reflected the social class composition of the population. Even so, they acknowledged that up to 60% of their sample had problems with spelling. They argued that the most likely causes of low standards of literacy in the prison population are environmental: namely, inadequate instruction, emotional disturbance, low motivation and low aptitude. However, the argument that low aptitude is more likely to be a cause rather than a consequence of weak literacy skills is not supported by Whyte's longitudinal research (1993), referred to in Section 2.4.

In a study commissioned by the Home Office on the Probation Service's approach to the literacy needs of offenders (reported by Davis *et al.* 1997 and Webster *et al.* 1999), it was found that there was considerable variation between different services and that literacy has a low profile in most areas. According to Davis *et al.* (1997: viii), 'If and when an offender's poor level of literacy becomes apparent, the action taken depends more on the staff member's interest in the subject and knowledge of local sources of assistance than it does on service-wide policies and dedicated systems.'

Where priority was given to work on literacy, it was in connection with employability under the Employability, Training and Education (ETE) scheme and so restricted to those offenders seeking employment. Probation officers reported that they had no specific training in identifying literacy needs and given their intensive workload, tended to focus on what they considered to be the more immediate critical needs of offenders stemming from issues such as repeat offending, domestic problems, homelessness and addiction. Systems for identifying and referring offenders with literacy problems were not uniform within or across services and officers were unable to provide accurate data regarding offenders in their care. Although there was some acknowledgement among the officers surveyed of the link between low educational achievement and offending, there was less awareness of the barrier that a lack of literacy represented in relation to the Probation Service's programmes for rehabilitation.

The researchers also identified several barriers to raising the profile of literacy support within the Probation Service:

- the restricted views of officers on the potential of improved literacy to have an impact on offenders, deriving from a functional concept of literacy (the acquisition of basic, minimal skills and procedures) as opposed to a critical one which emphasises the importance of acquiring literacy as an active social process, linked to specific practices and contexts and crucial for problem solving and integration
- the perceived impact on the Probation Service of the increased emphasis in directives from the government on the protection of the public as opposed to rehabilitation of offenders
- the low profile of literacy support (which is provided through partnership agreements with outside agencies) in budgetary debates, planning of core services and staff training
- resistance by offenders to attempts to address literacy, as they are often skilled in concealing problems and associate current interventions with their previous negative experiences of schooling.

The study (Davis *et al.* 1997: 52) concluded that:

*There are very few contexts which do not have a literacy component. It follows, therefore, that most literacy practices can be promoted with reference to offenders' ability to manage personal circumstances. Given that probation officers see their role as helping offenders to change their social practices, to address their offending behaviour, and to keep within the boundaries of the law, then the ability to address literacy needs should be an important component of the probation officer's professional armoury.*

In recent years there have been renewed efforts to address low levels of literacy among offenders, through the government's Skills for Life strategy. The recent Home Office evaluation of the benefits of basic skills training (Stewart 2005) focused on 290 prisoners who had started basic skills training in 2002 (amounting to more than 30 hours in 34% of the full sample and to more than 100 hours in a further 39%). These prisoners were followed up at various intervals between 2 and 12 months after release and report a re-conviction rate of 44% for an average follow-up period of less than a year. Although Stewart makes no claims about the degree to which this sample is representative, it is safe to infer that basic skills training did not have an impact on recidivism, since the national average re-conviction rate at 12 months after release was 44% in 2001/02 (see offender management analysis section in RDS NOMS 2004). Stewart (2005:4) also found that improvements in literacy and numeracy 'were not significantly related to prisoners' chances of finding employment or reoffending after release'.

In view of the rather more encouraging conclusions drawn by Porporino and Robinson (1992) about the impact of adult basic education programmes on recidivism in the US and Canada, questions must be asked about how prisoners perceive Skills for Life literacy instruction, especially whether they believe it to be relevant to their interests, needs and personal development.



**Section 3****How should prisoners be taught?**

There are no systematic reviews of research into adult learning in which pedagogical approaches have been related to learning outcomes – and certainly not in UK prisons. In these circumstances, we have to be guided largely by the opinions of experts in the field and by evidence provided from educational research with younger age groups. Many experts believe that all human beings seek cognitive, emotional and social growth through the satisfaction of innate needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. If true, this statement applies equally to learners, teachers, managers and policy-makers. If imbalances arise, the resulting tensions are sometimes constructive and sometimes destructive.

What can all too easily become a polarised ideological debate between supporters of teacher direction and supporters of learner empowerment is tempered by the knowledge that educational research has consistently found only modest support for more open pedagogical approaches when compared with traditional instruction. For example, Colliver (2000) concluded that problem-based learning has not delivered substantial benefits in medical training, although it does place greater responsibility on learners. On the other hand, long-term benefits have been claimed for problem-based learning across many subject areas at Maastricht University, where it has been used for nearly 30 years (Schmidt 2001).

What is clear from mainstream educational research is that learners can usually learn a lot from each other as well as from the teacher, especially when they give, receive and act on feedback. Language interventions are well supported in the context of learning difficulties or disabilities but again, the quality of feedback is crucial. Formative assessment (Black and Wiliam 1998) provides regular, well-tuned feedback and is one of the promising methods of assessment recommended by Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood (2004) in their review for the LSDA of effective pedagogy for developing thinking skills in post-16 learners. These authors also recommend programmes that involve peer interaction and feedback.

Research also supports the idea that learning should always involve a certain amount of challenge, even for people who are sensitive about their areas of weakness. Cognitive challenge needs to be built into all educational courses for prisoners if their thinking and problem-solving skills are to develop. An emphasis on subject-specific but potentially transferable thinking skills is recommended by Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood (2004) for all post-16 learners. Frequent opportunities should be provided for prisoners to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning, both as individuals and as groups. Paired learning, reciprocal teaching and Lipman's 'community of enquiry' (2003) are well-proven pedagogical approaches. Whatever approach is used, students and teachers should regularly look for ways of applying their knowledge and skills in different contexts.

In their ongoing research on improving the literacy and numeracy of disaffected young people in custody and in the community, Hurry *et al.* (2005: 7) report that students complained about 'too many worksheets, which were too easy and sometimes repeated'. Lesson observations revealed that work was selected to match students' interests only in art lessons, while group discussion rarely took place outside drama and life skills classes. Hurry *et al.* conclude that a direct or imposed style of tuition fails to elicit either interest or willingness. They urge policy-makers to take more account of young people's values, views and culture and to do more to embed education more strongly in a vocational context.

Education classes in prisons are generally small and in theory, it should be possible to provide a high-quality educational experience, with ample opportunities for participants to ask questions and explore ideas. However, in practice, there are often disruptive members of a group who really do not want to be there and are not fully engaged. As Kiser (1987) pointed out, teachers do not have an easy ride. It is especially important for them to create a positive climate and for this reason, they need to be highly skilled in group work. Motivation is crucial and unless class members are able to engage with the learning process both cognitively and emotionally, learning that is meaningful – or 'transformative' (Mezirow 1991) – is unlikely to occur.

In his foreword to *Time to learn*, Gus John says that consulting with prisoners is 'an obvious first step' towards improving educational provision for them (Prison Reform Trust 2003: v). It is clear from that study that prisoners do not like being treated as if they were back at school. They welcome being treated as adult students, but would like to see (among other things) 'more and different activities, greater personal choice ... accreditation and vocational skills training leading to qualifications ... more interaction between teachers and prisoners' (Prison Reform Trust 2003: 59).

Attendance on courses provided in prisons has traditionally been voluntary, but there is an increasing level of 'prison pressure' to attend some courses. These relate to completing a sentence plan or meeting the terms of the Parole Board in addressing offending behaviour, both of which can influence the date of release. Sentence planning should ideally be used on a formative basis to give prisoners a voice and to encourage them to take increasing responsibility for their own learning. It is to be hoped that ILPs will be used in just this way. There is, however, a risk that they will become disempowering, especially where assessment is a one-off, one-way process carried out before trust is established by staff who do not know the prisoner well.



According to Newman, Lewis and Beverstock (1993), many prison educators in the US have embraced the principles of adult learning known as 'andragogy', as advocated by Knowles (1970). This approach can be simply explained using five basic assumptions about adults as learners:

- Adults have a deep psychological need to be self-directing.
- Prior experience is a resource base on which to build new learning.
- Adults want to learn whatever they think may help them to fulfil a role in society.
- Adults have a problem-centred approach to learning.
- Adults are more motivated to learn by internal factors than by external rewards.

The principles of andragogy have not, as yet, been formally tested in the context of prison education and some of them may work best only for some teachers and learners in certain situations. However, most educators do seek to move learners towards self-direction and an intrinsic interest in learning.

For the purposes of this project, the research team compiled a working list of quality indicators, which is based on the work of Olson (1970) and highlights the importance of competence, autonomy and relatedness. The list was designed for use in the case studies and has a set of items relating to productive thinking. It contains 25 items, 15 of which refer explicitly to aspects of group interaction. Pedagogically, it places learning in a central position, without removing control and direction from the teacher. Feedback, formative assessment and constructive evaluation are seen as processes to which the learners contribute. The items represent the views of educational experts, but can also be supported empirically.

### **Personalisation**

- The teacher knows each member of the group well.
- Group members are able to make choices concerning tasks.
- The teacher modifies questioning to ensure understanding.
- No member of the group feels unable to make a contribution.
- The teacher evaluates progress on an individual basis.

### **Interpersonal regard**

- There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and regard.
- Patience is shown by the teacher and by some group members.
- There are some signs of willingness and good humour.
- No one who makes a mistake is ridiculed.
- Teacher evaluation is supportive.

### **Group activity**

- Seating facilitates interaction.
- The teacher has explicit social aims (eg cooperation).
- The teacher facilitates communication among group members.
- Members of the group sometimes take the lead or initiate.
- Group members are free to disagree with the teacher's ideas.
- The group is cohesive and members are interdependent.
- All members are seen to cooperate.
- There is shared decision making.
- Conflicts are resolved within the group.
- Group members contribute to the evaluation of others.

### **Productive thinking**

- There is time in which to think things through.
- There are opportunities for speculation and discovery.
- Group members sometimes work out and defend their own views.
- There is evidence of planning and reflection by group members.
- The teacher draws attention to good thinking.

**Section 4****Courses provided in HM Prisons****4.1****Families of programmes**

The various intervention programmes and educational courses available in prisons have different purposes and draw upon different branches of applied psychology and pedagogical approaches in different ways and to differing degrees.

There are, for example:

- vocational programmes which aim to improve prisoners' employment prospects
- courses aimed at equipping prisoners to set up and control a small business (for self-employment on release)
- key skills programmes, including the wider key skills
- information and communications technology (ICT) programmes which aim to develop awareness and use of new technology
- Skills for Life courses in literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy
- social and life skills courses
- courses designed to reduce drug and alcohol dependency
- holistic therapeutic community regimes, whether 'democratic' or 'concept-based'
- personal development programmes which aim to modify or develop prisoners' thinking or behaviour (sometimes referred to as general offending behaviour programmes and cognitive skills programmes)
- programmes based around the humanities which aim to cultivate individual critical and creative abilities through a broad liberal curriculum
- degree courses through the Open University
- creative arts classes and projects
- physical education, sport and recreational programmes
- faith-based programmes which aim to promote a set of religious values and beliefs and associated behaviours.

These involve different approaches to teaching and learning and different ideas about how knowledge and identity are constructed. They may emphasise:

- individual or isolated learning
- teacher-led or 'direct' instruction
- mastery learning of skills built up from their components
- knowledge acquisition based on reading/writing/speaking/listening/multimedia
- the development of practical skills through modelling by the teacher and guided practice
- student-centred learning with the teacher as a facilitator of 'meaning making'

- problem solving drawing on personal experience and meeting real-life needs
- language and discourse development through dialogue in groups
- the examination of ideas, beliefs and values through Socratic questioning
- critical thinking, reflection and transformative learning.

---

## 4.2

### Thinking skills interventions in prisons

Thinking skills interventions in schools, colleges and universities are typically designed to improve educational outcomes, especially through developing critical and creative thinking and enabling learners to regulate their thinking and learning more effectively. Moseley *et al.* (2004: 8) define thinking skills approaches as 'courses or organised activities which identify for learners translatable mental processes and/or which require learners to plan, describe and evaluate their thinking and learning'. The long-term aim of such courses is to improve strategic thinking, self-awareness and reflection, together with a positive set of values, beliefs and personal qualities.

The thinking skills (or cognitive skills) interventions developed specifically for use in prisons have been strongly influenced by developments in clinical psychology, especially the development and use of cognitive-behavioural therapies. Unlike thinking skills interventions with an educational focus, they are primarily directed at changing patterns of behaviour. Nonetheless, the generic characterisation of thinking skills approaches used by Moseley *et al.* (2004) also applies to these programmes. In the UK, thinking skills interventions in prisons are generally organised and delivered through prison psychology departments and do not fall under the remit of either education managers or heads of learning and skills. The staff involved are mainly psychologists and prison or probation officers, but may include people with educational training and experience who have trained as tutors.

Following the recent failure to find that R&R and ETS cognitive skills interventions were making a significant impact on re-conviction rates in England and Wales (Cann *et al.* 2003; Falshaw *et al.* 2003), Friendship, Falshaw and Beech (2003) published a critique of what they describe as an 'over-reliance on reconviction data as the sole measure of treatment efficacy'. While accepting that re-conviction rates are a fundamental measure of treatment success, they claim that they cannot be considered in isolation from other treatment and resettlement factors. They argue that a treatment profile is contingent upon the treatment climate, the quality of the delivery of the programme and how the individual responds to treatment.

They claim that it is more appropriate to base evaluation on data which has clinical significance by identifying which offenders have benefited from treatment and how. They go on to offer an integrated model for the evaluation of accredited cognitive-behavioural interventions which includes pre-treatment and post-treatment psychometric tests, participants' own feedback on the benefits of treatment, treatment summary documents and daily assessments from prison staff such as wing logs and adjudication records, together with the assessments made by group facilitators. They say that changes in intermediary treatment targets – for instance, socialisation and control of impulsivity – are best monitored on a day-to-day basis when the skills acquired during therapy are put to the test. The same authors believe that the following factors are crucial for the effectiveness of any cognitive intervention and should therefore be part of the criteria for evaluation studies:

- group climate, characterised by high cohesion, good organisation and being well led by facilitators
- encouragement of the open expression of feelings
- a sense of group responsibility
- a sense of hope among group members, coupled with an institutional climate where prison staff are involved in treatment and model appropriate attitudes and behaviour.

In our view, these arguments apply equally to the educational and vocational aspects of rehabilitation. In a positive institutional climate in which learning and behavioural change are supported, together with help in applying and strengthening new skills after release, it is more likely that ex-prisoners will abandon crime. It would therefore be sensible to build 'joined-up' services around all forms of intervention that have been shown to have a positive impact on recidivism – and that includes education.

---

### 4.3

#### **Contextual factors affecting the quality and impact of R&R and ETS programmes**

In an attempt to find out more about the contexts and conditions that affect 'what works', the Home Office commissioned two further pieces of research: one focusing on the quality of delivery of cognitive skills programmes; and the other examining the demands that such programmes make on the literacy skills of prisoners and how these demands support (or fail to support) the intended outcomes.

Clarke, Simmonds and Wydall (2004) reiterate the point that the issue is not 'what works', but what works for whom, under what conditions and in what types of setting. Their qualitative study involved interviewing prisoners and prison staff (n=113) across six prisons, in order to ascertain what constitutes successful programme delivery and impact. The research aimed to complement previous quantitative studies in trying to establish what constitutes effective practice and in identifying benefits other than that of reduced recidivism.

In relation to beneficial outcomes, their report points to perceptions of improved prisoner behaviour, increased self-confidence and improved literacy skills. Given the nature of the study, it is not surprising that the factors which influence the impact of treatment are a complex combination which includes the individual's characteristics, the institutional context in which the programme takes place and how individuals engage with the cognitive skills programme.

Interestingly, it was found that only a minority of participants could be described as self-developers who were highly motivated to change before embarking on cognitive skills training. Significant numbers were either hostile or instrumentalists (those who believed that attendance was a prerequisite for achieving a positive parole report). When asked about programme aims, very few interviewees (whether participants or staff members) mentioned desisting from offending. The research team also drew attention to the fact that only a minority of programme staff volunteered information about the theoretical rationale underpinning cognitive skills programmes; and highlighted the fact that a 'one size fits all' approach to programme delivery fails to take account of the needs of certain groups, including those with literacy difficulties.

In their evaluation of the demands made on prisoners' literacy skills by general offending behaviour programmes, Davies *et al.* (2004) examined three accredited programmes: Think First, Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) and Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R). The reading, writing, speaking and listening skill levels of more than 450 offenders were compared with the levels demanded by the programmes. Overall, the findings indicate that the reading and writing demands of the programmes were high and the speaking and listening skill demands were very high (at or beyond a C Grade pass at GCSE). While many of the sessions across the three programmes demanded a Level 1 reading ability, the reading level of 57% of the offenders was below Level 1. In relation to speaking and listening, the norm demanded by the programmes was Level 2, but rising to Level 3 and beyond.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, 35% of offenders probably had skills in speaking and listening below Level 1. The authors made a number of recommendations, including the adaptation of programme materials, the provision of literacy support (preferably during the programme) and improved training for tutors to help them to interpret assessment information and modify their teaching to accommodate offenders with poor literacy skills.

<sup>2</sup> As no auditable assessment tools were available, a specially designed contextualised checklist was used.

#### 4.4

#### **The current picture: education and training provision in prisons in England, with special reference to communication and thinking**

Current government policy is placing increasing emphasis on coordinated programmes of work, training and education for individual prisoners, with the aim of making a significant difference to prisoners' life chances and rates of re-offending and re-conviction (OLSU 2005a, 2005b). However, Prison Service key performance targets are concerned much more with written literacy skills and work skills than with oral and listening skills. Although literacy and numeracy are intended to encompass skills of communication, oral skills programmes such as those provided by the ESB are not, at the time of writing, explicitly encouraged by government agencies.

In the adult version of *The offender's learning journey* (OLSU 2005b), there are sections on 'the arts curriculum', 'personal and social development' and 'other subjects'. It is only in these sections that the words 'thinking' and 'creative' appear. Even there, thinking is mentioned only in the context of using progress-file materials 'to enable learners to manage their learning and development by acquiring thinking and planning skills' (OLSU 2005b: 31). There is little encouragement of courses which seek to develop productive thinking and creativity for purposes other than gaining qualifications leading to employment. However, it is recognised that some individuals 'may enjoy learning for its own sake or it may make them better placed to give something back to their community. The availability of other subjects ... may engage otherwise reluctant learners; the range and level of subjects offered will be according to local interest and need' (OLSU 2005b: 36).

The document does acknowledge the importance of education and training outside the area of basic skills, such as work-related learning, ICT and e-learning, acquiring life and social skills and gaining access to higher education. It specifically refers to 'transferable work skills' and to the wider key skills.<sup>3</sup> While this is welcome, much will depend on how far teaching and training are informed by an understanding of enquiry-based learning, formative assessment and a dynamic and reflective pedagogy. Moseley *et al.* (2004) found that it is only at Key Skills Level 4<sup>4</sup> that there is a significant need for reflective thinking and for the strategic management of thinking. The current emphasis in prison education and training on the less challenging lower levels of attainment may mean that some prisoners fail to take responsibility for their own learning. Much will depend on whether they develop the trust and confidence to provide constructive ongoing input into their ILPs.

3 These are: Working With Others, Improving Own Learning and Performance and Problem Solving.

4 At this level, candidates have responsibility for managing substantial and complex activities, from the planning through to the evaluation stage, a process lasting about 3 months.



The prison population stands at 76,017 (as at 2 June 2005) and is continuing to rise (the 2003 total was 73,922). Despite increasing pressures on accommodation and resources, it is clear that progress towards priority basic and key work skills targets has been good. In 2003/04, there were 12,529 basic skills qualifications gained at Entry level, compared to a target of 7,174. There were 17,864 qualifications gained at Level 1, compared to a target of 13,660; and there were 13,338 qualifications gained at Level 2, compared to a target of 13,648. The national target for key work skills was exceeded by a substantial margin. Here there were 103,583 qualifications delivered, almost doubling the national target of 52,672 (HM Prison Service 2004).

Yet some agencies and experts have reservations about the 'box-ticking' emphasis on basic skills. Indeed, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (HoC ESC 2005) expressed concern that a narrow focus on basic skills key performance targets may have been detrimental. This concern about the delivery of basic skills courses is supported by (a) recent Home Office research (Stewart 2005) which failed to find a connection between improvement in literacy and numeracy skills and prisoners' chances of finding employment or not reoffending after release; and (b) the tentative finding of Hurry *et al.* (2005) that the amount of daily reading done in prison does more to raise test scores in literacy than attending basic skills classes.

The HM Prison Service *Annual report and accounts* (2004) went on to affirm broader aims:

*Education for prisoners is a vital element of the Delivery Plan for Reducing Re-Offending and is provided by [the] Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU), a joint DfES/Home Office Unit. OLSU works with other key partners to ensure that the best possible service is delivered to meet the educational needs of prisoners. The aim is to provide an integrated service focused on individual need[,] to improve prisoners' skills, enhance their employability, and prevent them from re-offending. Additional funding from the 2002 Spending Review was allocated during 2003–2004 for Young Offender Institutions, women's prisons and local prisons, and to roll out a secure version of Ufl/LearnDirect to 20 establishments. Increases have also enabled the Prison Service to appoint over 100 senior Heads of Learning and Skills throughout England and Wales who will be responsible for raising standards, widening access and improving continuity. £2.8m of the £20m from the Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF) for offender learning over 2002–2003 and 2003–2004 was allocated to prison establishments in the first year. This investment will allow local prisons to improve the quality of initial assessments, transform libraries into learning resources centres, upgrade work-based learning provision, and provide classrooms adjacent to prison workshops to integrate learning and skills.*



Although prison staff have achieved much more in recent years than simply meeting key performance targets, a survey by the LSDA (Vorhaus 2003) based on questionnaire returns from 91 prisons and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) found that there was a considerable amount of 'spare capacity' in prison education and training provision, with only 6% of establishments operating at full capacity in education and 18% at full capacity in training. Overall, as shown in Table 1, 39% of the prison population were engaged in full- or part-time education or training, the majority of these in part-time education (22% of the total prison population). Young Offender Institutions were the most successful in terms of providing full- and part-time training places (12% and 10% respectively of inmates in YOIs) and full-time education places (22% of inmates in YOIs).

In the years ahead, the LSC will expect the quantity and quality of education and training to continue to improve, with a target of 50% participation in learning and skills provision featuring in The offender's learning journey (OLSU 2005b). The main target areas for improvement are assessment, teaching, record keeping and 'joined-up' practice, especially between criminal justice and community agencies.

**Table 1**

Prison education and training provision  
*Adapted from Vorhaus (2003)*

NB:  
there may be an element of double counting, with inmates accessing both part- and full-time education and training.

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Full-time education</b>	<b>Part-time education</b>	<b>Full-time training</b>	<b>Full-time training</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>HMP</b>	8%	23%	5%	<1%	36%
<b>YOI</b>	22%	7%	12%	10%	51%
<b>HMP YOI</b>	6%	23%	8%	3%	40%
<b>All</b>	9%	22%	6%	2%	39%



## Section 5

### Why the ESB's emphasis on oral communication may add value to prison education

The English Speaking Board (ESB) aims (2002b: 3) 'to promote and assess effective, confident and constructive oral communication skills ...with the focus at assessment on the candidate both as a speaker and as an active listener sharing knowledge and ideas with others.'

ESB provides qualifications in Spoken English through four main series of assessment programmes:

- Junior & Senior
- Vocational & Professional
- Certificate of Achievement
- English as an Acquired Language (EAL).

The aims and objectives for each series are cross-referenced where applicable to key skills in Communication and to the wider key skills of Working With Others, Improving Own Learning and Performance and Problem Solving.

In each series, there is a common core of presentation skills and interactive questions and discussion. The presentation focuses on knowledge and skills in differing contexts, based on the candidate's own experience, vocational context or interests, appropriately illustrated with visual aids. Other tasks, depending on syllabus and level, may include literary interpretation through reading and memorisation, telephone or interviewing skills, current affairs and debate (ESB 2002b).

<sup>5</sup> Now called 'Speaking and Listening Skills for Adult Learners' and accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) at Levels 1–3 from September 2005.

In the Oral Resources for Adult Learners (ORAL) syllabus,<sup>5</sup> listening, speaking, reading and writing all play a part, but in such a way that all learners can achieve success. For example, if reading aloud is too difficult, a story can be prepared for oral presentation. Relevance to real-life experience is ensured by requirements such as explaining an everyday skill, talking about a key event of personal significance and reviewing, evaluating and planning educational or work-related experiences. In all assessments, there is group interaction involving questions and discussion, with an expectation of interpersonal sensitivity, relevant questioning and productive thinking.

This brief outline of the ESB approach shows that it is capable of meeting many of the psychosocial, language and literacy learning needs of prisoners, both in terms of content and pedagogy. The terminology used in the statement of aims and objectives for the Vocational & Professional series 2003–2005 shows that in many ways, these are ‘thinking skills’ programmes. For example, they aim to:

- focus on purposeful transferable communication skills
- encourage awareness of the social, cultural and personal aspects of communication
- develop [the] ability to express [one’s] self with vitality, relevance, cogency and clarity
- develop effective design and use of audio-visual aids
- explore and demonstrate problem-solving strategies
- consider, monitor and evaluate choices and strategies
- encourage reflection on one’s own achievements.

As one of the education managers to whom we spoke recognised, the oral emphasis in ESB courses and assessment ‘allows the intelligence of prisoners to be recognised and developed’. An ESB tutor who spoke to us about the kinds of thinking required in preparing and giving presentations emphasised thinking ahead and understanding what will interest and engage other people (for the complete interview, see Appendix 4).

In terms of the integrated framework for understanding thinking and learning developed by Moseley *et al.* (2004), the ESB Vocational & Professional series has a strong emphasis on self-regulation through strategic and reflective thinking, as well as on cognitive skills across the range of information gathering, building understanding and productive thinking.

Pedagogically, the ESB approach has strong student-centred features, as well as making use of a variety of questioning techniques and critical thinking approaches. As communication is a social process, it is all-important to create a cohesive and supportive group in which social and personal learning can take place. Workshops are provided for tutors, introducing them to a variety of group activities for building trust by sharing experiences. All of the courses provide opportunities for students to acquire and demonstrate competence, to exercise autonomy and to experience relatedness.

In 1999, the ESB secured National Lottery funding to extend its work into HM Prisons after a successful pilot in which the relevance of oral communication became clear. It was noted that many prisoners found difficulty in speaking for themselves at Parole Boards, in groups or even on the telephone. Those behind the initiative also believed (ESB 2002a: 1) that verbal confidence could provide a ‘kick-start’ to literacy: ‘In a prison population where verbal inarticulacy can fuel physical violence and where 65% of inmates are classified as illiterate, good oral skills are meaningful currency.’

The specific project aims identified by ESB (2002a: 2) were as follows:

- to give participants the opportunity to develop practical oral skills (often missed in earlier education) as part of a supportive, interactive group
- to help inmates to enter and benefit more fully from courses directly affecting offending behaviour
- to develop confidence and self-esteem and improve social awareness and integration
- to enable probation and psychology services to see the results of improved oral skills.

Between 1999 and 2002, 1,450 students were involved in ESB oral communication training by prison tutors, and 28 prisons entered 1,137 candidates for external assessment by ESB examiners. Nine different ESB syllabuses were used, the most popular being the Oral Resources for Adult Learners (ORAL), with 17.6% of candidates taking General Vocational courses and 9% taking courses in the EAL series. Most prisons explored two to three syllabuses over the period to ensure the 'best fit' for each candidate. Overall, 97.6% of those entered achieved certification at one of five grades.

It is stated in the ESB's final report (2002a: 6) that the following benefits for students were consistently identified by educational management, tutors and candidates:

- the value of the supportive group context for encouraging oral communication
- the discipline of listening as well as speaking, and organising thoughts for assessment in a participating group
- practice in presentation skills
- understanding different styles and techniques in verbal communication
- development of self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem from the starting point of the candidate in authority
- increased tolerance towards others and a decrease in the frustration sparked by inarticulacy
- a realistic starting point for building or reinforcing a range of written and social skills
- complementary evidence for other courses and for key skills
- gaining and developing skills and attitudes relevant to greater employability
- [the] compactness and flexibility of the course for a constantly changing prison population.

ESB provided the present research team with 40 student feedback forms from five prisons which were found to support most of the above claims. Half of the sample found the oral communication component the most valuable part of the course. Illustrative comments are given below, ordered to bring out key themes.

### **Group work**

*Learning to work as a group and being confident with people I do not know.*

*Beginning to learn to trust other people.*

*The group atmosphere and the 'gelling' of the group.  
The helpfulness of the group and honest criticisms given.*

*Everyone helping each other.*

*The many ways of how to interact with a person or a great number of people.*

*Learning to speak and to learn with others.*

*I really enjoyed the course and working with a team!*

### **Empowerment through choice**

*Competence is developed in all four language skills – in reading, writing, listening and speaking – and all without the standard academic pressures, because the material choice is yours!*

*I found all the elements within the course inspiring and non-threatening. This was because I was the one that had to choose and provide the subject matter, etc.*

*You can discuss what your interests are and choose your own subjects.*

### **The challenge of presenting to others**

*Getting over my fear of being tongue-tied.*

*I liked the 4-minute presentation, as for me it was one of the only challenges I've had in prison and I found that exciting.*

*I have not stood in front of a group of people and read a book or anything to them since I was a teenager and felt totally at ease – I'm dyslexic!*

*I enjoyed the challenge of speaking to others about what I am interested [in].*

*To overcome shyness and to build confidence.*

*Standing up and speaking to a group of people, as it is [a] great confidence builder.*

**Skill building**

*The teacher helped me express myself.*

*Helping me to get myself listened to.*

*Yes, making myself more clearer, speaking slower and being a better communicator.*

*This course has shown the value and necessity of using modified language in order to communicate effectively with other people.*

*I liked the idea of being aware of everyday skills and putting them into action and noticing the difference to my performance. Especially good for interviews and standing reports.*

*I think it will help me to understand people more clearly and also knowing what they are talking about.*

*It will help with presentations in Communication Skills and has helped improve my confidence with speaking in group situations.*

*Learning how to prepare a curriculum vitae.*

**Thinking**

*To be afforded the opportunity to communicate and discuss a variety of issues and subject matters unrelated to prison life.*

*The course has given me the opportunity to exchange ideas with others.*

*The course did help me. It helped me communicating and understanding other people.*

*I liked the phone calls and planning the talk – because it was fun.*

*I liked the talk part the most as it made me think and has given me confidence.*

*It was useful to articulate my thoughts on a given subject, as per the examination requirements and to be prepared to offer a reasoned explanation for my views when questioned by the examiner and fellow group members.*

**Self-development**

*I like the course because it gives me confidence in everyday life.*

*I enjoyed showing the group I was more than just an addict.*

*By learning to get rid of my... mask and being me.*

*Being aware of my attributes and making the most of them.*

*Yes, it has given me my confidence and shown me that I do have a voice.*

### **Anticipated value after release from prison**

*I'd like to bring my education further and also find out what kind of work I can do with what I learn here!*

*I plan to do some sort of youth work when I get out.*

*When I am released I would like to carry on with the things I have been learning on the course, as I feel that they will help me in my work.*

*I plan to get back into the leisure industries and I have to get information across to people making sure that I'm understood and heard.*

*When leaving prison I may have to speak to young offenders.*

*I intend to give talks at the Rehabilitation Centre.*

*It would have to be when I get outside as I am going to go to college!*

*I think it will help me when I have to talk to my children so that it doesn't go in one ear and out the other.*

*It was absolutely brilliant – she was always there for us all and ensured the pace was right for everyone. Overall the course put me in good stead for whatever my next step is...*

The research team therefore saw an opportunity to carry out an independent evaluation of the ESB approach, both retrospectively and prospectively. The available evidence suggested that ESB oral communication courses are emotionally powerful for many and may well bring other benefits, even perhaps reducing recidivism by opening up alternative paths, including employment options. The opportunity to transfer oral communication skills to other contexts (including other courses) within and outside prisons is always available to prisoners, whereas this is far less applicable with other kinds of course. ESB courses incorporate literacy components, but present these in holistic, non-threatening ways. They make use of participants' existing knowledge, skills and life experiences and are presented within a learner-centred approach which has much in common with Knowles's andragogy (1970). The emphasis on developing a supportive group climate and on learning to understand other people's points of view is such that we thought it reasonable to look for immediate benefits in terms of effective communication with peers and with prison officers. We thought that there might even turn out to be measurable improvement in terms of prisoner conduct, especially in terms of involvement in violent incidents.

Funding for the evaluation was secured from the LSRC, as an extension to our previous research project on thinking skills, and permission was also obtained from HM Prison Service.



**Section 6****Research questions and methodological issues**

It was originally intended that this multifaceted evaluation would achieve an adequate degree of methodological rigour through a retrospective study, a prospective study and four case studies. However, we soon discovered that we had been too ambitious and were forced to scale down some parts of the project and to omit certain components. What follows in this section is an outline of what we had originally planned to do, a description of what we succeeded in accomplishing and an account of some of the pitfalls and problems we encountered.

**6.1****Our original research plan and research questions**

- Early in the project, a *postal survey* would be carried out in prisons in England and Wales to find out which courses were believed by prison staff to help in developing thinking skills. We thought that this would reveal how prison educators perceive the cognitive demands of the courses they teach, especially the thinking required to gain a pass in ESB oral communication courses.
- A *retrospective study* would be undertaken to evaluate the impact on recidivism (if any) of taking an ESB oral communication course during the period 1999–2003. This was conceived as a quasi-experimental study, with at least one relevant control group. We also planned to test the hypotheses that (a) taking an ESB course provides a bridge into further learning; and (b) is followed by improvements in behaviour in the prison environment.
- A *prospective experimental study* would be initiated to find out if prisoners are able to communicate better with fellow inmates and prison staff after successfully completing ESB courses.
- Four *case studies* would be carried out, using qualitative methods, to compare different approaches to learning and skill development among prisoners. A fifth case study, independently funded by the LSRC, was to be carried out by colleagues at the University of Strathclyde (see Part B of this report).
- In a *final report* to the LSRC, contextualised evidence about the impact of ESB oral communication courses would be presented and recommendations would be made for the future development of teaching and learning approaches found to be effective or to hold promise.

In our original plan, we set out the following research questions.

**The survey****Research question 1****How far do thinking skills approaches feature in the courses and training provided in HM Prisons?**

We planned to send a questionnaire to all prisons in England and Wales, asking them to identify courses that contained elements believed to help in developing or extending prisoners' thinking skills.

## **The retrospective study**

### **Research question 2**

**Did discharged prisoners who successfully completed ESB courses between 1999 and 2003 have a lower re-conviction rate than expected?**

To answer this question, we needed to obtain the following information from national databases maintained by RDS NOMS. This body is part of the Research Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) at the Home Office which leads on research and analysis for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

- re-conviction information with dates for the ESB group (minimum target sample size for statistical purposes: (170)
- re-conviction information for a non-ESB comparison group.

### **Research question 3**

**Did taking an ESB course act as a bridge into further learning?**

We planned to address this question using quantitative and qualitative methods. If supplied with a chronological record of all courses taken by each inmate, we would see whether participation in learning tended to increase after successful completion of ESB courses. Qualitative evidence would be available from participant evaluation forms and from one of the case studies.

### **Research question 4**

**After successfully completing ESB courses, were prisoners less likely to be involved in violent incidents in prison?**

To answer this question, we needed the following information:

- evidence of conduct while in prison on a month-by-month basis from admission to the present.

## **The prospective study**

### **Research question 5**

**After successfully completing ESB courses, are prisoners able to communicate better with fellow inmates and prison staff?**

This part of the study was designed as a controlled trial with random allocation of inmates to an ESB course (target sample size 100) or to an alternative appropriate educational course (n=100). For ethical reasons, participating prisons would be asked to ensure that inmates not allocated to an ESB course would be priority candidates for the next ESB course to be run. The data to be collected would be ratings by prison staff as well as self-report information, namely:

- ratings of communicative competence by custodial staff before and after starting new courses (for ESB and control groups)
- self-report experience via learning questionnaires completed by prisoners.

## The case studies

### Research question 6

#### **What are the distinctive features of ESB courses compared with other courses which make significant demands on thinking?**

We planned to conduct four case studies in particular prisons, sampled on the basis of the range of available courses thought to make significant demands on thinking. Each case study would focus on a particular type of course. The methods and research tools involved in the prison case studies would include the following:

- study of course aims and objectives, with a special focus on thinking skills
- study of recommended approaches to teaching and learning
- observation of session(s) of a course or activity
- focus-group discussions with course participants
- interviews or discussions with prison staff.

---

## 6.2

### **Addressing our research questions**

#### **The survey**

The questionnaire postal survey was successfully carried out.

#### **The retrospective study**

We addressed Research question 2 by comparing re-conviction rates among ESB-qualified prisoners (n=211) with national statistics for a period of up to 2 years following release from prison. We also obtained and analysed data for a non-ESB local control group (n=155).

We were not able to answer Research question 3 through a chronological study of records of the various courses taken by prisoners, as these records were either not available or were inadequate for our purpose.

The logistical problems we experienced throughout the project in obtaining data about prisoners meant that we were not able to address Research question 4. We could not realistically ask more of staff in the establishments which were already involved in other aspects of the project, and other prisons dropped out after initially agreeing to participate.

#### **The prospective study**

For the prospective study, we obtained and analysed data for two cohorts of ESB course members in one establishment, meaning that we fell far short of our intended sample size. We had to abandon the idea of random allocation to different courses and were unable to establish a control group.

## **The case studies**

We completed four case studies, which served our purpose well, despite the fact that one of the courses proved to be more relevant to the theme of communication than to thinking. Researchers at the University of Strathclyde were unable to obtain permission to carry out a fifth case study (see Part B of this report).

---

### **6.3**

#### **Doing research in prisons: pitfalls, problems and politics**

Here we briefly describe some of the difficulties we encountered.

##### **Gaining approval for the study**

We submitted a detailed proposal to the Prison Service psychology department in early June 2003 and were refused permission in December 2003. We reworked the proposal, focusing more on oral communication than on thinking skills, and obtained agreement and support from HM Prison Service in January 2004.

##### **Speaking to the 'right' person**

The issue of getting past 'gate-keepers' is not exclusive to prison research, but we found it a particularly difficult process. Early in the project, we received an encouraging informal response from prison staff who attended a meeting set up by Strobe College. We then approached the governor (or director) at various prisons, seeking their agreement in principle to take part in an aspect of the research. Our requests were often passed on to either the head of learning and skills or the education manager.

Interestingly, we often found great enthusiasm (and cooperation) for the research from individual staff members, but not always from all key people within an establishment. In one prison – which has been particularly helpful during all phases of the research – we went through the proper channels for permission, but then dealt directly with a tutor who was highly supportive of the research. However, this did not always work, and there was another prison which we identified and approached with a request for it to serve as a case study. The tutor was very keen, the governor agreed, but our request was refused by the head of learning and skills and the education manager – a process which took over 3 months from start to finish. Changes of prison staff also made our task more difficult.

##### **Security clearance**

The understandable complexities of this process meant that often at least 3 months were spent negotiating and arranging physical access to a prison once it had been agreed in principle.

## The retrospective study

We experienced a considerable degree of sample attrition after the initial agreements and permissions had been negotiated. In some cases, we found that prison records were inadequate for the purpose of accessing the Offenders Index. However, we eventually achieved an adequately sized sample of ESB course completers and a local control group whose members had taken educational courses other than ESB. It proved impossible to obtain release dates either from the prisons themselves or from the Parole Board, so this was done in a two-stage process with the assistance of Home Office RDS staff. The Offenders Index provided details of re-convictions, again in a two-stage process, most recently providing data up to April 2005.

We were unable to carry out the second and third parts of the retrospective study, as the first part proved to be onerous and time-consuming for the prison staff who assisted us with data collection.

## The prospective study

Obtaining an adequate sample for the prospective phase of our research turned out to be impossible. We had planned to collect data on prisoners attending the ESB courses both before and after their attendance. We were reliant on staff (prison officers and tutors) to help with this and offered payment to cover their additional work. We approached institutions which we knew were offering ESB courses, identified a possible sample of 17 prisons and spoke face to face and by telephone with staff who agreed tentatively to their involvement. However, as our deadline approached, every single prison dropped out. One had agreed to take part and had been planning for a period of 5 months to collect data, but dropped out the week before the ESB course was to begin. Others agreed and then, up to 7 months later, dropped out. The reasons given varied, but there were common themes, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
Reasons for non-participation  
in the prospective study

Reason	Frequency (n)
Refused outright – no reason given	7
Already taking part in the retrospective study phase	2
Did not agree with our methodology	1
Staff changes	2
'No time/too difficult'	5

With an extended timetable, we then tried to enlist other institutions to take part in the prospective study. We found a further possible three, but of these, only one prison went ahead and successfully collected data for two ESB classes.

### **Case study visits**

We aimed to visit four institutions in order to conduct case studies of a range of courses which focused on developing thinking skills. This again proved to be difficult, and our access to visit institutions was a long, drawn-out process. Often we were told that it was just 'not a good time', and events such as a staff member leaving, an attempted suicide, an impending inspection or negative media coverage were all cited (understandably) as reasons for not taking part in this phase of the research. Despite this, there were four institutions that were very keen to be involved, even though, in one case, the researchers found on arrival that the course they had expected to see (ESB oral communication) was not running, so they focused on an ESOL course instead. However, education department staff were always welcoming and they and the prisoners we met devoted considerable time and effort to making our visits worthwhile.

### **Research tools**

With the case study visits, security issues meant that we were limited to paper and pens as our tools for research, which meant that the researchers were heavily reliant on each other. One person would take notes while the other person conducted an interview or discussion and *vice versa*. Both researchers took notes during the observation of course sessions – one concentrating on processes and interactions, while the other focused on content.

## Section 7

## How far do thinking skills approaches feature in the courses and training provided in HM Prisons?

## 7.1

## Results of a questionnaire survey carried out between March and June 2003

139 questionnaires were sent out to all the prisons in England and Wales and 83 were returned. This gave an overall response rate of 60%. Most of the 83 respondents had managerial roles, nearly half of them being education managers. Nineteen of the sample had generic managerial responsibilities, while 10 more were in psychology departments and six worked in the area of resettlement.

The questionnaire asked:

Please identify up to eight courses offered in your institution, which in your opinion contain elements which help to develop or extend prisoners' thinking skills. These may be educational courses, offending behaviour courses, vocational or non-vocational courses.

Respondents were then asked:

What is the emphasis on thinking skills in this course?  
A, B or C?

- A  
Its primary aim is to develop thinking.
- B  
The course aims to develop transferable skills.
- C  
Thinking skills are required to deal with the course subject or activities.

6 Please note that this categorisation reflects the theory base of a course rather than the professional affiliation of those teaching it. Assignment to a category was carried out by one of our researchers who sought further information about course aims and content when in doubt about which category to use.

By asking for a forced choice in this way, we hoped to distinguish between courses where improving thinking was the main focus, as opposed to those where the emphasis was on the development of transferable skills in other areas (eg key skills), or where thinking was not a major focus or was less important than the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. A summary of the findings is given in Table 3.

**Table 3**

Types of course thought to develop thinking skills, with varying degrees of emphasis

Key:

A =  
courses where the primary aim is to develop thinking

B =  
courses which aim to develop transferable skills

C =  
courses where thinking skills are required

Course category <sup>6</sup>	A-rated (n)	B-rated (n)	C-rated (n)	Total	% of total
Educational	41	140	57	238	47
Psychological	116	57	29	202	40
Vocational	3	45	15	63	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>503</b>	
% of total	32	48	20		100

It is clear that all types of course were seen both as developing transferable skills and making demands on thinking skills. Vocational courses were mentioned less frequently, but this should not be taken to imply that thinking is less important in such courses. In fact, the ratio of vocational courses to educational courses mentioned (1:3.8) is very similar to the ratio of inmates attending such courses nationally (1:3.6) (Vorhaus 2003).

About a third (32%) of all courses mentioned were thought to have the development of thinking as their primary aim, this being especially true of psychological courses and least true of vocational courses. A major aim of both educational and vocational courses was thought to be the development of transferable skills.

Tables 4–6 show which courses were most frequently nominated as having an A, B or C emphasis on thinking (for the complete tables, see Appendix 2).

**Table 4**

A-rated courses receiving  
10 or more mentions

**Courses where the primary aim is to develop thinking**

<b>Course name or type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS)	29
Drugs and alcohol	21
Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R)	14
General education	12
Literacy and numeracy	10

**Table 5**

B-rated courses receiving  
10 or more mentions

**Courses which aim to develop transferable skills**

<b>Course name or type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Literacy and numeracy	44
Work-related courses	34
Arts-related courses	17
Information technology	17
Key skills	14
General education	11
Social and life skills	10

**Table 6**

C-rated courses receiving  
10 or more mentions

**Courses where thinking skills are required**

<b>Course name or type</b>	<b>Number</b>
General education	12
Work-related courses	12
Literacy and numeracy	10
Social and life skills	10



What stands out most clearly from the analysis of the complete data (see Appendix 2) is that respondents clearly saw the family of cognitive skill programmes (often known as thinking skills programmes) as having the primary aim of developing thinking. ETS and R&R programmes featured very strongly here. However, it is also worth noting that courses dealing with drugs and alcohol abuse were also predominantly A-rated, as were a variety of psychology-based courses such as anger management.

Of the educational courses, there were five types which received the same number of A ratings (or more) in comparison with B or C ratings:

- general education courses
- citizenship
- personal development
- Problem Solving (key skills course)
- health-related courses.

Other types of course where a significant minority gave A ratings were: literacy and numeracy and Communication (key skills course).

The vast majority of educational courses – including literacy and numeracy, IT and arts-related courses, key skills, business studies, sports-related and food-related courses – were seen as primarily seeking to develop transferable skills rather than to develop thinking as such. This was also true of courses dealing with group work and resettlement. Of the 25 courses dealing with social and life skills, five were A-rated, with 10 receiving B ratings and 10 being C-rated.

We were not able to determine how ESB oral communication courses are perceived, as there were no specific references to these courses by our respondents. This in itself may be an important finding, again perhaps suggesting that the title of a programme may affect how it is perceived. Although we have argued that ESB courses can be regarded as thinking skills courses, the term ‘spoken English’ may lead some to believe that the courses are about elocution or speaking with correct grammar.

Overall, we found it heartening that significant numbers of managers in prisons were aware of the importance of thinking skills in the education and training provided in prisons. The notion of transferable skills was also salient for many. What is less clear is whether courses were delivered in such a way that course participants were able to make connections between them, thereby increasing the possibility that they would be able to generalise their knowledge and skills both within and outside the prison setting. We had already identified this as a key question in relation to ESB oral communication courses.



## Section 8

## The retrospective study

**Research question:**

**Did discharged prisoners who successfully completed ESB courses between 1999 and 2003 have a lower re-conviction rate than expected?**

**8.1****Project samples and a national reference group**

7 As there is no significant gender difference in the national 1-year and 2-year re-conviction rates for adult male and female prisoners (see offender management analysis section of RDS NOMS 2004, Table 11.3), it is possible to compare the entire ESB sample of 211 prisoners with national recidivism statistics for adults.

The ESB project sample consisted of 211 prisoners (195 men and 16 women<sup>7</sup>) who (a) obtained an ESB oral communication qualification prior to release from prison, (b) were released between July 2000 and December 2003 (median date September 2002) and (c) are known to have been re-convicted (or not) in the first 12 months after release. Release was, in most cases, subject to supervision of various kinds and recidivism is defined as being convicted of any index offence at a post-release court appearance within the specified period. Care has been taken to ensure that the procedures followed are the same as those used by Cancell and others in the compilation of national statistics (see offender management analysis section in RDS NOMS 2004).

8 In order to preserve confidentiality, the name of this prison has been changed.

The ESB sample completed ESB qualifications in four different prisons, but the majority (81%) did so in just one of the four establishments (HMP Grangehurst<sup>8</sup>). In that prison, a full range of oral communication, ESOL and vocational grade courses was provided and 24% of the sample took more than one ESB course. This establishment is a Category C prison which has a vulnerable prisoner unit (VPU) for about 100 prisoners and a drugs-free therapeutic community wing for about another 100. Some prisoners from each of these sections take ESB courses. Preparation for ESB examinations is closely integrated with other courses (such as key skills and Business Studies), rather than being provided on a stand-alone basis.

We have little information about the other educational, vocational and psychological courses which may have been taken by members of the ESB project sample. However, it is reasonable to suppose that in many cases, the ESB course was only one of several educational courses taken, especially for prisoners with longer sentences.

A local control group was obtained by identifying all prisoners who first began an education course at HMP Grangehurst during sentences being served in 2001 and 2002, but who did not take an ESB qualification before being released. Release dates for these prisoners occurred between January 2002 and April 2004 (median date November 2002). The control group therefore consisted of prisoners who were in HMP Grangehurst at roughly the same time as the ESB group and who had voluntarily opted to take at least one course provided by the prison education department, just as the ESB course members had done. Release dates and re-conviction data for both project samples were provided by staff at RDS NOMS. A sample size of 155 men was achieved, for whom a period of at least 1 year had elapsed between release and the latest updating of the Offenders Index database.

The various courses taken by members of the control group are representative of the range of provision at HMP Grangehurst and are listed in Table 7. One course was specifically designed for members of the therapeutic community and worked on mutual self-help principles. This was an intensive course of daily sessions in which the group increasingly took responsibility for facing reality and for problem solving.

**Table 7**

Courses taken by members of the control group

Key:

OCN =

Open College Network

OCR =

Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examination Board

Course name or type	Number
Helping Hand (learning difficulties and behavioural issues)	12
Learning difficulties	13
Adult Basic Education	29
ESOL	2
Computers	2
Private study	3
Study on wings	7
Pre-access (to further/higher education)	5
Access to Higher Education	8
Therapeutic community	11
Bright's Project (linked to furniture assembly)	6
Preparation for Work (especially social and life skills) (OCN)	31
Key skills	9
Business Studies (OCR)	15
Not recorded	2

The design of the retrospective study makes it possible to compare the re-conviction rates of the ESB and control groups as well as to compare both with national statistics. In doing so, it is necessary to take account of other factors which are known to affect recidivism. The data provided by the individual prisons and HM Prison Service allow us to consider age, type of offence, number of previous court appearances and sentence length.

The national statistics for 2002 provide a reference group of 46,160 adult male prisoners; the males in the project samples can be meaningfully compared against this group on relevant indicators. As shown in Table 8 below, the age distribution of both project samples (ESB and control group) differs somewhat from the national figures, in that they contain rather more men in their 20s and fewer who are over 40. This has the effect of increasing the chances of re-conviction after release in the project samples, since national re-conviction rates for adults tend to decline with age (see offender management analysis section in RDS NOMS 2004, Table 11.8).

**Table 8**

ESB and control group samples and national population (males) compared by age

Key:

▲ = significantly larger percentage than in national sample  $p < 0.05$

▼ = significantly smaller percentage than in national sample  $p < 0.05$

Age range	% in ESB project sample (n=195 males)	% in local control group (n=155 males)	% nationally in 2002 (all males over 21)
21–24	26	30 ▲	21
25–29	29 ▲	20	22
30–39	34	36	33
40–49	8 ▼	7 ▼	14
50–59	3	6	6
60+	1 ▼	0	3

When the average age of the ESB and control groups is compared, no significant difference is found, the mean ages being 29.5 and 29.6 years respectively.

In terms of main offence category, the three groups correspond to a moderate degree, as shown in Table 9. The main differences are as follows: there are significantly fewer prisoners convicted of violent crimes in both project samples and significantly more convicted of burglary, when compared with the national average. The ESB group includes a relatively large number of prisoners convicted of robbery, while the control group includes significantly more convicted of theft and significantly fewer sex offenders than the national average.

The overall effect of these differences on a comparison of re-conviction rates with national statistics is again to put both project groups at a disadvantage, but especially the control group. National figures show that those involved in theft and burglary are more likely to be re-convicted than the average prisoner (although this does not apply to those convicted of robbery), while violent offenders and sex offenders are less likely to be re-convicted. The order in which offence categories are listed in Table 9 is from highest to lowest risk of re-conviction (as taken from the *Offender management caseload statistics 2003*, published in the offender management analysis section of RDS NOMS 2004, Table 11.2).

When the ESB and control groups are compared category by category, it is found that there are significantly more theft offenders in the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ) and significantly more sexual offenders in the ESB group. This means that the control group has a higher risk of re-conviction, so this difference has to be taken into account when comparisons are made.

**Table 9**

ESB and control groups and national population (males) compared by type of offence

Key:

▲ = significantly larger percentage than in national sample

▲ = p<0.05

▲▲ = p<0.01

▲▲▲ = p<0.001

▼ =

significantly smaller percentage than in national sample

▼ = p<0.05

▼▼ = p<0.01

Offence category	% in ESB project sample (n=195 males)	% in local control group (n=155 males)	% nationally in 2002 (all males over 21)
Theft/handling	5	12 ▲	8
Burglary	23 ▲▲	27 ▲▲▲	17
Criminal damage	3	3	2
Motoring	4	3	4
Other	2	5	5
Robbery	21 ▲▲	14	14
Violence	12 ▼▼	14 ▼	22
Drugs	18	21	16
Fraud/forgery	2	0	2
Sexual	9	2 ▼▼	10

**Table 10**

ESB and control groups and national population (males) compared by number of previous convictions

Key:

▼▼ =

significantly smaller percentage than in national sample p<0.01

▲▲▲ =

significantly larger percentage than in national sample p<0.001

Previous court appearances	% in ESB project sample (n=195 males)	% in local control group (n=155 males)	% nationally in 2002 (all males over 21)
0	12	7 ▼▼	16
1–2	15	11	13
3–6	18	14	18
7–10	19	17	15
11+	37	52 ▲▲▲	37

In terms of the number of previous court appearances resulting in convictions, the ESB project sample closely resembles the national population (see Table 10). If anything, the ESB project group is at a slight disadvantage, since nationally, re-conviction rates are positively correlated with the number of previous convictions. For example, male prisoners with 7–10 previous re-conviction court appearances are 16% more likely to be re-convicted than the national average (calculated from the offender management analysis section of RDS NOMS 2004, Table 8.7). However, the control group does differ very significantly from the national averages in that fewer of its members had no previous convictions and substantially more of them had 11 or more previous convictions. This places the control group at a real disadvantage when it comes to comparing re-conviction rates with the national statistics.

The ESB and control groups are far from equivalent in terms of previous court appearances, the difference favouring the ESB group which contains significantly fewer high-frequency offenders.

When the ESB project sample is compared with the national statistics for adult male prisoners released in 2001 (see offender management analysis section of RDS NOMS 2004, Table 11.3), it is found to include a significantly higher percentage of prisoners serving sentences of 4 years or longer (29% compared with 9% nationally) ( $p < 0.001$ ). For such prisoners, the chances of re-conviction are substantially lower (by 45%) than for those with shorter sentences, so there is a clear bias here in favour of the ESB project group in terms of sentence length. In the control group, 25% were serving sentences of 4 years or longer. Because of this, separate comparisons of re-conviction rates will be made for prisoners with sentences of less than 4 years and sentences of 4 years or longer.

The fact that the control group members tend to have rather shorter sentences than those in the ESB group ( $p < 0.05$ ) means that the groups are not well matched, and again the control group is disadvantaged in terms of probable re-convictions.

Overall, there is no selection bias to favour either the ESB group or the control group when comparisons are made with national statistics, since there are more unfavourable than favourable differences between these samples and the national prison population, especially in the case of the control group. The fact that the control group is not well matched with the ESB group in terms of offence category distribution, previous court appearances and sentence length means that these differences must be taken into account when comparing re-conviction rates.

---

## 8.2

### Results

#### ESB group

**21 % of the ESB sample were re-convicted in the first year after release, compared with 44% nationally for prisoners released in 2001. This difference in percentages is highly significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level and represents a 52% lower re-conviction rate for the ESB group.**

Low re-conviction rates in the first year after release apply both to the 171 prisoners at HMP Grangehurst (22% of whom were re-convicted) and to the 40 other prisoners in the sample from three other prisons, 18% of whom were re-convicted.

In the ESB sample, the 1-year re-conviction rate for prisoners with sentences of less than 4 years was 22%; and for those with sentences of 4 years or longer, it was 20%. These statistics are very significantly below the national figures (with significance levels of  $p < 0.001$  and  $p < 0.01$  respectively).

**Re-convictions in the first 2 years after release can be compared using a reduced sample size of 122. When this is done, it is found that 43% of the ESB group were re-convicted, compared with 58% nationally (a reduction of 26%). This difference in percentages is statistically significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level.**

## **Control group**

**28% of the control group were re-convicted in the first year after release, compared with 44% nationally for prisoners released in 2001. This difference in percentages is highly significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level and represents a 36% lower re-conviction rate for the control group.**

Within the control group sample, the 1-year re-conviction rate for prisoners with sentences of less than 4 years is 35%; but for prisoners with sentences of 4 years or longer, it is only 5%. Both of these re-conviction rates are significantly below the national figures (with significance levels of  $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.001$  respectively). In the control group, prisoners with longer sentences ( $n=38$ ) have very good outcomes, with the difference between those with shorter and longer sentences reaching a high level of statistical significance ( $p < 0.001$ ). Closer examination reveals that no re-convictions at all for prisoners who took the following courses make the greatest contribution to the good results for prisoners with longer sentences: Access to Higher Education ( $n=6$ ), Bright's Project ( $n=3$ ), Business Studies ( $n=3$ ), key skills ( $n=3$ ), learning difficulties ( $n=3$ ), therapeutic community ( $n=3$ ), ESOL ( $n=2$ ).

**Re-convictions in the first 2 years after release can be compared using a reduced sample size of 115. When this is done, it is found that 50% of the control group were re-convicted, compared with 58% nationally (a reduction of 14%). This difference in percentages is statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.**

## **Comparison of ESB and control groups**

It is clear that both the ESB and control groups had a much lower 1-year recidivism rate than expected on the basis of the national statistics for 2001. However, there is not much difference between the ESB and control groups, certainly not at a statistically significant level. Although the ESB group has rather lower 1-year and 2-year re-conviction rates when no account is taken of other relevant factors, this apparent advantage disappears when those factors are controlled. For example, after removing individuals from the groups (using a random number generator) to achieve a good matching in terms of offence categories, previous court appearances and sentence length, the 1-year re-conviction rate becomes 25% for both the ESB group and the control group.

Unadjusted re-convictions at 2 years after release were also similar between the ESB and control groups (43% for the former and 50% for the latter). However, when adjustments were made to match the groups, it was found that 50% of the ESB group and 45% of the control group were re-convicted (a non-significant difference).



We need to remember throughout that in this evaluation, we are comparing two groups of prisoners who are engaged with education in some way. We do not know how many courses the individuals in our samples took altogether, only that those in the control group did not take an ESB course. We do know, however, that 60 of the ESB sample took at least one other educational course, and for this sub-sample, the 1-year re-conviction rate was 25%.

---

### 8.3

#### Interpretation of results

The very large reduction in the 1-year re-conviction rates for both groups in the present study is a major finding, all the more convincing because the initial advantage was considerably eroded in the second year after release, bringing re-conviction rates closer to the national norm. In interpreting these results, we shall consider the following factors:

- nature of the establishments
- overall quality of provision
- quality of education provided
- possible selection effects
- quality of specific courses
- other relevant differences between the groups.

Nearly all of the prisoners in the present study were in Category C institutions, therefore presenting a somewhat below average risk to the community. However, according to a House of Commons written answer given on 23 May 2000 (HoC 2000), the mean 2-year national re-conviction rate for prisoners in closed Category C establishments is very close to the national average (56% compared with 58% for 1995). It is therefore not plausible to attribute the lower re-conviction rates of the project's ESB and control groups to the nature of the establishment (HMP Grangehurst), where 81% of the ESB group and all of the control group were held.

It is possible that there are substantial differences between prisons in terms of the overall effectiveness of their approaches to rehabilitation. If HMP Grangehurst were much more effective than most prisons in all aspects of its provision, the low re-conviction rates we found for prisoners involved in education there would simply reflect a positive ethos pervading the establishment. We are unable to assess this possibility quantitatively: (a) because we did not collect re-conviction data for HMP Grangehurst prisoners not involved in education; and (b) because HM Prison Service does not break down re-conviction statistics by type of prison or by individual establishment. However, recent inspection reports do not strongly support this explanation, as they indicate room for improvement in several areas, especially resettlement (HMIP 2005).

Another possibility is that there is something very special at HMP about the general education provision at HMP Grangehurst, including ESB course delivery. To return a 24% re-conviction rate for all 366 prisoners taking education courses over a given period, when the national average was 44%, is a considerable achievement. The fact that the ESB and control groups did equally well may be because a team of excellent teachers applied effective pedagogical approaches in all courses they taught. As ESB oral communication courses are integrated with other courses at HMP Grangehurst, it is likely that the teachers concerned do not reserve features such as building a mutually supportive atmosphere or asking students to make oral presentations and give each other feedback to classes preparing for ESB examinations. From our conversations with education staff both inside and outside HMP Grangehurst, we have anecdotal evidence to support the idea that the educational provision there over the relevant period was of a high quality. However, equally good outcomes for ESB course members (only 18% being re-convicted within 1 year) were found for the 40 prisoners in our sample who were held elsewhere. If we go along with the idea that education provision at HMP Grangehurst was especially good, we need to accept that it may have been just as good in other establishments. It is certainly possible that the prisons which took up what was an innovative approach (training for and running ESB courses) during the period of National Lottery funding were those with sufficient energy, enterprise and creativity to take on something new. The former education manager at HMP Grangehurst who supported the introduction of ESB courses there told us that there was sufficient flexibility to allow the use of promising new approaches. He also spoke very highly of the teachers involved.

The 52% reduction in recidivism reported here for ESB course members is greater than the 30% difference which, in Clark's 2001 study, applied to prisoners involved in any form of education or training. We have estimated that if the overall 1-year re-conviction rate at HMP Grangehurst is assumed to be equal to the national average, the advantage of being in education there (as opposed to not being involved) translates into a 50% lower rate of recidivism. This supports, but certainly does not prove, the idea that educational provision at HMP Grangehurst was of high quality.

We still have to consider the possibility that the positive outcomes reported here are largely attributable to selection effects. This is a variable which has rarely, if ever, been accurately measured in 'what works' research. There are very few randomised controlled trials in the literature and even there, we have no way of telling what the psychological impact may be of non-inclusion in a particular intervention group. In their Amity therapeutic community study, Wexler *et al.* (1999) allocated men randomly to treated and untreated groups, but all had originally volunteered for treatment. As is suggested by Clark's (2001) findings, referred to in Section 2.2, those left untreated may have felt they had been excluded from a valuable experience and developed feelings of resentment.

Volunteering for education or for other forms of rehabilitation has historically been the norm in British prisons. Perhaps the best way for us to estimate how much of the selection effect is attributable to the very fact of volunteering is to look at the recidivism benefits claimed in a wide range of the rehabilitation literature. Looking at the UK prison studies summarised in this report, five found reductions of 10% or less, while one found a 30% lower re-conviction rate for those taking part in education or training. The percentage reductions in re-conviction rates reported in other countries tend to be higher than in the UK literature, generally between 20% and 30%. It is noticeable that those for which the largest reductions are claimed tend to be relatively expensive and time-consuming. Thus, the Amity therapeutic community 'completers' were treated intensively for 377 days on average and those who completed aftercare were treated for 651 days. Post-secondary education, as in the University of Victoria/Simon Fraser project, usually involved the completion of several modules over a considerable period, especially if followed up by further college education in the community.

Volunteering is a behavioural indicator of motivation for something, but not necessarily of motivation to make substantial changes in one's way of life. De Leon *et al.* (2000) found no correlation between the initial assessed motivation of volunteers for the Amity drug-free therapeutic community and rates of re-incarceration, and only a weak correlation ( $r=0.15$ ) between initial motivation and the decision to take up aftercare. It is therefore highly unlikely that volunteering for a short educational course in the present study could be in itself an important predictor of reduced recidivism.

If the association between education and reduced recidivism found in the present study is too large to be accounted for by self-selection alone, we need to look for other explanations. In the case of the ESB sample, it is possible that the benefits accrue because, as qualitative evidence from interviews and written feedback suggests, many prisoners gain in confidence as learners after obtaining a qualification in oral communication. They can see the relevance of the skills they acquire and begin to make use of them. In other words, the ESB approach is efficient in meeting at least some of the learning needs of course participants, and it seems likely that some prisoners make good use of their improved oral communication skills after release. Confidence building may also be the common factor in the other educational courses where the lowest rates of re-conviction were found, since they clearly equip participants with some of the skills required to succeed in life (eg Access to Higher Education, Bright's Project (furniture assembly) and Business Studies).

It is noticeable that the apparent advantage possessed by both our samples is much more apparent in the first year after release than over a 2-year period. This suggests that more adverse factors came into play the longer the former detainees remained in the community; and that in some cases, an initial advantage was not consolidated by further productive learning. Nevertheless, a 26% reduction in the 2-year re-conviction rate for the ESB sample is a very positive finding and compares very well with anything relating to relatively short periods of intervention in the international 'what works' literature.

In the control group, prisoners with shorter sentences were significantly more likely to be re-convicted within a year of release ( $r=0.30$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This is in line with previous research, but in the ESB group, the correlation was virtually zero ( $r=0.01$ , not significant). This suggests that the ESB qualification is a good option for prisoners with short and medium-length sentences, while other educational courses come into their own for prisoners with longer sentences.

In the control group, re-conviction during the first year after release was predicted moderately well by the number of previous court appearances ( $r=0.44$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In the ESB group, the prediction, although still positive and highly significant ( $r=0.24$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), was significantly less accurate (at the  $p<0.05$  level) than in the control group. The fact that in the ESB group, offending behaviour after release was less strongly determined by previous criminal career history is consistent with the interpretation that for a number of prisoners in that group, significant changes took place during custody. However, the prediction of re-conviction up to 2 years after release was found to be equally strong in the two groups ( $r=0.44$  for the controls; and  $r=0.42$  for the ESB group). This suggests that in the same way as the differences between our project samples and national figures were seen to narrow during the second year after release, the pressures to return to crime can eventually outweigh any rehabilitative advantage gained while in prison.

## Section 9

## The prospective study

**Research question:**

**After successfully completing ESB courses, are prisoners able to communicate better with fellow inmates and prison staff?**

As well collecting two sets of ratings of communicative competence, our intention in this part of the project was to add to our understanding of how ESB courses are perceived by course members. We also collected self-report attitude data which we thought would predict successful outcomes: (a) in terms of the examination; and (b) outside the classroom.

9 In order to preserve confidentiality, the name of this prison has been changed.

Data is available for only two course cohorts in a single establishment, HMP Millwood<sup>9</sup> (where we also carried out a case study). The data comprises prisoners' self-reported experience of learning and attitudes towards it, completed ESB course feedback forms and ratings of communicative competence by education and custodial staff before and after taking an ESB course (Vocational Level 2). In one class, one prisoner was unable to take the examination for personal reasons; and in the other class, one withdrew before completing the course.

In the first class, two members declined to take part in the research, but seven completed the course and took the examination. In the second class, there were nine course completers, all of whom agreed in writing to take part in the research.

The Experience of Learning Questionnaire (ELQ) is a 20-item self-report instrument specially devised for this project and given to prisoners at the start of the ESB course. It employs a 4-option scale and was used to assess an individual's general attitude towards learning and to see if attitude was predictive of outcomes.

ESB course feedback forms were completed by course members and 20 more were made available to us from previous classes. These are routinely used on ESB courses and ask about understanding of course aims, likes and dislikes, how any problems were overcome, what was valued and what might be changed.

Another instrument, for rating Inmate Communication Skills (ICS), was specially devised for this project. Its main purpose was to see if other members of staff noticed any improvements in communication skills outside the ESB class environment. Ratings of communicative competence were made on 12 items, with the response options 'Good', 'Fair', 'Poor' and 'Unable to judge'. In the first course, the ratings were made by a prison officer nominated by individual course members; and in the second course, by both a nominated prison officer and a nominated tutor. However, because of incomplete returns, 'before' and 'after' ratings are available for only 13 of the 16 course completers. The median time interval between ratings was 5 weeks and the ICS forms were completed by 10 different staff members. Two ESB tutors, who had not previously met the prison officers concerned, took on the task of collecting the data.

We are aware from our case study visit and from data provided by HMP Grangehurst about other educational courses taken by those who enrol for ESB courses that these groups usually include people from a wide range of educational backgrounds, some with university degrees and some with substantial global learning difficulties. The Level 2 vocational courses from which we collected data in the prospective study were not the first courses taken by these particular prisoners, since all had previously taken at least one other educational course. Only one individual was unable to write down his answers, so dictated them instead.

Responses to the ELQ show that most respondents had very positive attitudes to learning, as can be seen from the 15 items in Table 11 where the average response score was more positive than 'agree'.

**Table 11**

Distribution of responses to 15 ELQ items, ranked in order of positivity

Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel that I am getting somewhere in my studies	9	5		
I am more open-minded than I was a few years ago	8	4	1	
I try to understand other people's points of view	7	7		
Every day I add to my general knowledge	7	7		
You can learn a great deal from others when working in a group	7	7		
In a discussion group, it is important that people get on with each other	8	4		1
If I don't know a word, I try to find out what it means	7	5	2	
I like to bounce ideas off other people	6	7	1	1
I can learn things better now than when I was at school	7	4	3	
I wish I had more opportunities to learn new skills	6	6	1	
I learn lots of things because they may come in useful one day	5	9		
I like being responsible for planning a piece of work	3	11		
I like talking things through with people I trust	3	11		
I often think about how the world is changing	5	7	1	1
I like to figure out how things work	3	9	2	

The ESB course components on which prisoners were examined were as follows:

- project: a researched and practised oral presentation
- In Your Own Words: an oral account of an issue, drawing on contrasting sources and giving a personal view
- telephone skills: answering a query and taking a message
- questions and discussion: listening, asking and responding as a group member and as a presenter.

It can be seen that the course as a whole makes considerable demands on thinking skills. The project requires planning skills, understanding, productive thinking and the ability to reflect on and respond to feedback. The 'In Your Own Words' task is framed as requiring critical thinking, while understanding the needs and views of others is needed for taking part in discussion and for the telephone role play. A list of project topics chosen by the examined candidates is provided in Appendix 3.

We found that the ELQ instrument did have statistically significant predictive value in relation to the grades given by the examiner. Simple and multiple correlation techniques showed that the item 'I feel that I am getting somewhere in my studies' was the best overall predictor, while the item 'It's easy to concentrate on learning while you are in prison' predicted success in the 'In Your Own Words' component. The item 'In a discussion group, it is important that people get on with each other' predicted success in the telephone skills component, and the items 'I do not like solving problems by following rules or set procedures' and 'I try to understand other people's points of view' predicted success in the questions and discussion component. These predictive items make sense in that application to studying a topic, social sensitivity and productive thinking are all key requirements in ESB examinations.

Three of the ELQ items were also found to be significant predictors of improvement in communication skills as rated (in most cases) by prison officers. These items are:

- 'I feel that I am getting somewhere in my studies'.
- 'I (do not) hate it when I get things wrong in class or on a training course'.
- 'I wish I had more opportunities to learn new skills'.

In other words, a positive attitude towards learning and towards coping with mistakes was found to predict progress in communication skills, this time in an extra-curricular context.

The course feedback forms were very positive and only 5 out of 35 prisoners did not wish to undertake a possible follow-on ESB course before or after release. All said that the teachers had explained well what was wanted, but 10 course members wished for more time for purposes like additional practical communication exercises and more rehearsal of presentations.



Overwhelmingly, the best part of the course was thought to be the oral presentations, which were found to boost confidence after initial fears had been overcome. More than three out of four students explicitly praised the skills of the two teachers involved. Four prisoners said that they most valued seeing improvement with practice, while four mentioned the opportunity to research a topic and four mentioned the social interaction and support. Asked about building on the course through further opportunities to work in groups, all responses but one were optimistic and many were fulsome. Specific mention was made of drug-related peer support, ETS, gym instruction, key skills, interviewing, school outings and volunteering. Comments illustrative of the above themes are given below.

*I liked the whole course, 'cause it built up my confidence to stand and talk in front of people.*

*Emotions come back to me from my talk, but it helped me so much for the better.*

*The course can put you in some difficult situations, but I recognise this is part of the learning process.*

*I was able over a period of weeks to see my own progressions.*

*They were both good teachers and made me feel comfortable.*

*He constantly encourages his students, making the course a challenge, but at the same time light-hearted... I've gained confidence and trust.*

*The teaching given on this course is exceptional, and the only true group teaching I've witnessed in the whole of Millwood education centre.*

*I thought that the trust given us was good... The only problems I had were with the prison. I was not given proper access to the library.*

*I feel there should be more resources for the inmates to obtain information. More or any access to the internet would be priceless.*

*The course brought members of the group together through friendship and teamwork.*

*At times, group members got together to help each other and to improve their skills further and prepare for the exam.*

*I found that we were all rooting for each other which gives a person a big boost.*

*I am so grateful I was given the opportunity to do this course... I am currently running my own group at the moment (drug peer support). ESB has given me the confidence to do that.*



*Now when I do group work, I will be able to give my opinion, whereas before I would have just sat there and listened.*

*I would like the opportunity to take higher levels in the ESB examinations... I feel that inmates should not be restricted to Level 3.*

*I feel it will help me on my release in finding work.*

*You couldn't ask for a better character and confidence-building subject for present and future life.*

*I would recommend everybody to try this course. It has built up my confidence, I feel better for having completed this work.*

Relatively few ESB course members mentioned that improved communication skills would be useful to them in everyday prison life, so it was a rather unexpected finding that post-course ratings of Inmate Communication Skills were significantly higher than the initial ratings. This applied not only to the overall ratings, but also to each individual item at the 5% level of significance or higher. The five items showing the greatest degree of improvement were (in rank order):

- 1** giving information (to staff)  
( $p < 0.01$ )
- 2** understanding reasons (given by staff)  
( $p < 0.01$ )
- 3** thinking before acting or speaking  
( $p < 0.01$ )
- 4** personal requests (to staff)  
( $p < 0.01$ )
- 5** informal exchanges with prison staff  
( $p < 0.01$ ).

The post-course ratings were uniformly 'good' for six items, which suggests that a more discriminating scale is needed. What is worth noting is that among these six items are two which are of particular interest in relation to thinking skills: 'control of temper' and 'thinking before acting or speaking'.<sup>10</sup> It seems likely that having high expectations of prisoners in these areas can lead to real improvement.

These findings about communicative competence may be inflated because of 'halo effects' (where a limited number of positive impressions may have coloured other ratings of the same individuals) and will need replication on a larger sample and with officers other than those nominated by prisoners. However, the fact that ELQ items can predict improvement in ratings of communicative competence gives some credibility to those ratings.

<sup>10</sup> An ESB tutor whom we interviewed made a similar point: 'Prison staff like ESB – they can see the difference when a prisoner had done it – helps them to be calmer and more open to persuading rather than getting angry and incoherent.' See Appendix 4 for the full interview.

To summarise findings from the prospective study, we can say that it has provided confirmatory evidence for the claims made in the ESB final report (2002a) on its National Lottery-funded initiative (set out in Section 5). It also supports the initial evidence made available to us from course participants about the perceived value of the courses. We found that Level 2 course members generally had very positive attitudes towards learning, being open to the ideas of others as well as wanting to acquire new knowledge and skills. Perhaps because they had already engaged with education in a prison context, they tended to feel that they were making better progress with their studies as adults than they had at school. Those with positive attitudes towards learning tended to achieve higher grades in the ESB examinations and to be noticed by nominated officers as having better communication skills after gaining an ESB qualification.

**Section 10****The case studies****Research question:**

**What are the distinctive features of ESB courses compared with other courses which make significant demands on thinking?**

**10.1****Introduction**

Our purpose in conducting case studies was to use observation and interviewing to gain qualitative evidence about how an ESB oral communication course compares with other types of course provided in prisons, in terms of the demands made on thinking skills and other indicators of a positive learning climate. The ESB course we chose to study was located in a different prison from those which provided data for the retrospective study. The quality indicators we applied (see Section 3) have a strong emphasis on personal and interpersonal aspects of learning, as well as a category we call *productive thinking*, which covers what is sometimes referred to as *higher-order thinking*. This includes reasoning and critical thinking, problem solving and decision making, creative thinking, reflection and the use of metacognitive strategies.

We are aware that our 1-day visits can provide only snapshots and certainly do not provide any basis for generalisation. At best, they can provide suggestions for further research into the processes of learning and teaching.

Through observing and talking to prisoners and educators, we found evidence to substantiate many points made in the Prison Reform Trust report (2003) entitled *Time to learn: prisoners' views on prison education*. Prisoners generally welcomed the educational environment as a place where people can work together in collaborative and supportive ways and can, to some extent, escape the diminishing effects of prison regimes. One person said: 'This has given me back what prison has taken away.'

We present here only what emerged when we applied our indicators of quality to the four observed sessions. In all cases, two observers were present and agreed on the judgements made. A fuller version of the ESB case study is provided as Appendix 1.

**10.2****Key findings: ESB Oral Communication Level 1**

The session we observed was attended by 11 prisoners and was run by a tutor who was sensitive to the very diverse levels of confidence and competence in the group.

This session consisted of a recap of what had been learned in the previous session; an explanation and discussion of what makes a good presentation; group sharing and discussion of proposed topics for the end-of-course examination; a brief oral presentation by each person on an 'unseen' topic (followed by feedback and further guidance); and a series of appreciative descriptions of group members which had been prepared as a 'homework' task. The session ended with a reflective discussion about what had been learned through giving and listening to the various presentations.

<sup>11</sup> As measured by the percentage of recorded indicators out of the possible total per category.

In terms of cognitive demand, the activities included information gathering, building understanding and productive thinking. For all group members, there was an opportunity to plan a short talk on a subject of their own choosing and to compare their own performance with those of their peers, using criteria suggested by the tutor and others. The experience of actively participating in this way was clearly a challenging one for most participants and group members were very supportive of each other, clearly empathising with others who were finding it hard to cope.

Applying our quality indicators to the session, we found that personalisation, interpersonal regard and group activity were very strong areas,<sup>11</sup> closely followed by productive thinking.

The observers recorded positive evidence of the following features.

### **Personalisation**

- The teacher knows each member of the group well.
- Group members are able to make choices concerning tasks.
- The teacher modifies questioning to ensure understanding.
- No member of the group feels unable to make a contribution.
- The teacher evaluates progress on an individual basis.

### **Interpersonal regard**

- There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and regard.
- Patience is shown by the teacher and by some group members.
- There are some signs of willingness and good humour.
- No one who makes a mistake is ridiculed.
- Teacher evaluation is supportive.

### **Group activity**

- Seating facilitates interaction.
- The teacher has explicit social aims (eg cooperation).
- The teacher facilitates communication among group members.
- Members of the group sometimes take the lead or initiate.
- Group members are free to disagree with the teacher's ideas.
- The group is cohesive and members are interdependent.
- All members are seen to cooperate.
- There is shared decision making.
- Group members contribute to the evaluation of others.

### Productive thinking

- There is time in which to think things through.
- There are opportunities for speculation and discovery.
- Group members sometimes work out and defend their own views.
- There is evidence of planning and reflection by group members.

## 10.3

### Key findings: English Language

The session observed was a combined class, with 10 prisoners and three tutors present. The group consisted of men following a Level 1 English course who had joined with a GCSE class as a one-off experience during the prison's Adult Learning Week.

The session topic was dialect and the lead teacher presented four activities. These were predominantly oral and including two quizzes and some singing. The cognitive demand for the prisoners was almost all at the level of information gathering and sharing information to develop understanding; for example:

**Question** *Where does a Smoggie hail from?*

**Answer** *a) Consett; b) Gateshead; c) Middlesbrough; d) Durham.*

**Prisoner 2 explained** *If you go down, there's still a smog over Middlesbrough – it comes off the sea and gets trapped in the valley.*

There were no complex problem-solving activities, and no planning, monitoring or evaluation of thinking took place. However, three narratives featured in the lesson, one of them a song called *Fields of Athenry*, sung by Prisoner 9 to his own guitar accompaniment. This performance was an emotionally engaging experience, certainly requiring creative thinking by the performer.

Applying our quality indicators to the session, we found that interpersonal regard and group activity are the two strongest areas. However, although prisoners readily contributed information from their own experience, there were few opportunities for them to exercise choice or judgement. They were not involved in either planning or evaluating their thinking and learning, but did on two occasions break into spontaneous applause.

The observers recorded positive evidence of the following features.

### Personalisation

- The teachers know each member of the group well.
- The teachers modify questioning to ensure understanding.
- No member of the group feels unable to make a contribution.

### **Interpersonal regard**

- There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and regard.
- Patience is shown by the teachers and by some group members.
- There are some signs of willingness and good humour.
- Teacher evaluation is supportive.

### **Group activity**

- Seating facilitates interaction.
- The teachers facilitate communication among group members.
- Members of the group sometimes take the lead or initiate.
- Group members are free to disagree with the teachers' ideas.
- The group is cohesive and members are interdependent.
- All members are seen to cooperate.
- Group members contribute to the evaluation of others.

### **Productive thinking**

- There is time in which to think things through.
- There are opportunities for speculation and discovery.
- There is evidence of reflection by group members.

---

## **10.4**

### **Key findings: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

Eight prisoners participated in the session observed, with one of them acting as a support tutor to the ESOL teacher.

Men were working on their own or in pairs throughout and did not join in any group-based discussion. The pace of the session was relatively slow, as the tutor matched individual and paired activities to learning needs. Learners were working on a number of activities ranging from practising sounds, comprehension exercises, silent reading, indexing and listening to language tapes. The teacher and her assistant worked almost entirely with individuals or pairs, usually checking for understanding.

The cognitive demand for the prisoners was sometimes at the low level of copying words and practising sounds. The assigned tasks were all at the level of information gathering and developing understanding through reading, listening and exercises. There were no complex problem-solving activities; and no planning, monitoring or evaluation of thinking took place. However, the teacher did take time to help prisoners informally with 'extra-curricular' practical problems, such as the progress of visa applications, concerns about life on the wing and contact with the outside world.

Applying our quality indicators to the session, we found that personalisation and interpersonal regard were the two strongest areas.

The observers recorded positive evidence of the following features.

### **Personalisation**

- The teacher knows each member of the group well.
- Group members are able to make choices concerning tasks.
- The teacher modifies questioning to ensure understanding.
- No member of the group feels unable to make a contribution.
- The teacher evaluates progress on an individual basis.

### **Interpersonal regard**

- There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and regard.
- Patience is shown by the teacher and by some group members.
- There are some signs of willingness and good humour.
- No one who makes a mistake is ridiculed.
- Teacher evaluation is supportive.

### **Group activity**

- Group members are free to disagree with the teacher's ideas.
- The group is cohesive and members are interdependent.

### **Productive thinking**

- There is time in which to think things through.
- Group members sometimes work out and defend their own views.

---

## **10.5**

### **Key findings: Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS)**

The session observed was run by two tutors and attended by eight prisoners. It began with questions about past learning and ended with the setting of a homework task focused on a moral dilemma. There were two main activities: a role-play task involving two changes of role and a debate arising from written responses to a moral dilemma scenario. Although the tasks were structured ones, there was room for the participants in the role play to creatively add details to the characters they were playing.

Course members were on several occasions asked to recall and comment on their learning and were asked to use specific problem-solving strategies. The teacher asked a number of cognitively demanding questions (eg 'What is perspective taking?' 'Have we all got the same morals?' 'How do you decide when you can take responsibility?'). As well as building understanding, course members engaged in a considerable amount of productive thinking through role play, observation, writing down reasons for their opinions and in debate. Reflection was encouraged by asking participants to revise their first responses to the moral dilemma and to talk about the need to understand differences of opinion and cope with moral ambiguity.

During the session, two prisoners were reminded about mid-course reviews and the session ended with a brief birthday celebration for one of the course members.

Applying our quality indicators to the session, we found that personalisation and productive thinking were the two strongest areas. The presence of one hostile and one reluctant participant had an adverse effect on group dynamics, with one tutor claiming that the group was 'the worst lot we've ever had' in terms of motivation and understanding. Despite this, there was clear evidence that the activities had been thought-provoking and also, for some, emotionally engaging.

The observers recorded positive evidence of the following features.

### **Personalisation**

- Group members are able to make choices concerning tasks.
- The teachers modify questioning to ensure understanding.
- No member of the group feels unable to make a contribution.
- The teachers evaluate progress on an individual basis.

### **Interpersonal regard**

- The teachers and some group members show patience.
- There are some signs of willingness and good humour.
- Teacher evaluation is supportive.

### **Group activity**

- Seating facilitates interaction.
- The teachers have explicit social aims.
- The teachers facilitate communication among group members.
- The group is cohesive and members are interdependent.
- Group members contribute to the evaluation of others.

### **Productive thinking**

- There is time in which to think things through.
- Group members sometimes work out and defend their own views.
- There is evidence of reflection by group members.
- The teachers draw attention to good thinking.



---

## 10.6

### Discussion

In terms of overall ranking, the ESB course session received the highest number of quality indicators (23), followed by English Language (17), ETS (16) and then ESOL (14). This suggests that the ESB course experience is highly meaningful, in social, emotional and cognitive terms. None of the other courses we observed provided the same opportunities for building assessed activities around personal interests and areas of competence. All participants found giving an oral presentation daunting and it was usually a first-time experience for them. However, most described it as both difficult and fulfilling, a real learning experience.

The core activity of presenting a topic to others involves a considerable amount of planning. It provides prisoners with a challenging task which brings them together in positive ways, both in class and outside the education department. The quality of learning is enhanced through the feedback received and by learning from others. The fact that the ESB course session was highly rated for productive thinking (it was equal with ETS in this respect) confirms our belief that these courses provide much more than training in 'public speaking'. The repeated cycle of planning, doing, giving and receiving feedback helps to develop important cognitive and metacognitive skills, including those of strategic thinking and reflection.

The ESOL course received the lowest ratings from the researchers, since the session observed was relatively weak in terms of group activity and productive thinking. The English Language and ETS courses received similar positive ratings, despite the fact that our observers thought that ETS provided a rather better learning experience. The presence of two disengaged prisoners in the ETS course brought some of the ratings down, but the quality of productive thinking was in general very high.

The distinctive nature of ESB oral communication courses seems to lie in its multifaceted yet holistic nature, as well as the fact that the assessed presentations are about topics in which the course members are both interested and knowledgeable. More than the other courses we saw, the oral communication course places more responsibility for choice and problem solving on the individual learner, while at the same time ensuring a high level of social support through powerful group processes. The ESB emphasis on interactivity and reflective discussion was not unique, as it was also seen in the ETS session. However, it is worth noting that one feature of an ESB course is unique – in the final session, course members interact personally with their examiner, both in dialogue and in discussion. This point was strongly made by one of the HMP Millwood tutors (reported in Appendix 1) and by one of the ESB tutors at HMP Grangehurst in a telephone interview (see Appendix 4).

A number of common themes emerged from the case studies. We summarise these as follows.

- Mixed ability within classes was common throughout all the courses we observed. We saw evidence of tutors responding with considerable skill to individual needs.
- A climate of mutual support was evident in all sessions, even where there was relatively little group interaction or discussion. The tutors were excellent at building and sustaining this climate and we observed instances of peer support in all four sessions.
- Prisoners were generally aware of how far the skills they were acquiring were likely to be useful to them in the job market after release.
- With the exception of the ETS course, there was little evidence that the courses we observed were directly linked with sentence planning.

**Section 11****Conclusions**

We present first the conclusions drawn from the empirical studies we carried out, followed by others based on our understanding of the literature and of the prison system, as informed by our contacts with it.

---

**11.1****The survey**

Significant numbers of managers in prisons were aware of the importance of thinking skills in the education and training provided for inmates. The notion of transferable skills was also salient for many, especially in the context of education and training. While psychological courses were widely seen as having the development of thinking as their primary aim, this was also true of some educational courses, notably general education, literacy and numeracy courses and citizenship. Four respondents thought that this was also true of communication courses, while seven saw these courses as aiming to develop transferable skills.

ESB oral communication courses did not feature in the returns we received, but the survey did provide some support for our view that oral communication courses make considerable demands on thinking and help to develop transferable skills.

The fact that thinking and transfer are common concerns across disciplines and professions leads us to conclude that these issues need to be addressed jointly in policy, practice and training.

---

**11.2****The retrospective study**

A headline finding from this part of our research is that the 1-year re-conviction rate for prisoners who took ESB courses in four different establishments was less than half the national average (21% as against 44% nationally). One-year re-conviction outcomes in the ESB-qualified sample were independent of sentence length and not strongly predicted by the number of previous offences. This suggests that ESB courses may be especially beneficial for certain groups with a high risk of re-conviction (ie repeat offenders and those with shorter sentences).

However, the headline must be heavily qualified, since the local control group, whose members were engaged with education but did not take ESB courses, did equally well overall (when differences in offence categories, number of previous court appearances and sentence length were taken into account). In the control group, outcomes were best for prisoners with longer sentences and for certain types of course (especially Access to Higher Education, work-related courses and Business Studies).

However (and importantly), the fact that in one prison, the overall 1-year re-conviction rate for 366 prisoners engaged in education was 24% demonstrates that education can really make a difference. It also leads us to conclude that there are almost certainly big differences between prisons in the quality of education provided.

Two-year re-conviction rates were less impressive, showing that in many cases, a good start after returning to the community was not sustained. This may in part reflect the inadequacies of resettlement programmes and suggests that positive steps are needed after discharge to encourage people to continue with education and training.

We have tentatively concluded that it would be unwise to attribute the low rates of re-conviction found in this study solely to selection effects. However, even if the selection component is substantial, this is no argument for doing away with high-quality education and other rehabilitation programmes in the belief that prisoners who are currently given opportunities to learn will probably do just as well without them. We simply do not know how much worse those individuals might behave if deprived of grounds for hope and trust.

---

### **11.3**

#### **The prospective study**

This part of our research enabled us to confirm from another set of ESB course feedback forms that prisoners are positive about the aspects of the experience we had previously identified:

- group work
- empowerment through choice
- the challenge of presenting to others
- skill building
- thinking
- self-development
- anticipated value after release from prison.

Most course members agreed that the oral presentation was the best part of the course, especially in terms of building confidence. They often mentioned emotional and social benefits as well as cognitive ones. They were highly appreciative of the teachers and of the group climate of trust and support. Several made special mention of the opportunity to practise and learn from feedback – in other words, from formative assessment.

This evidence, together with that collected at the start of the course about attitudes towards learning, demonstrates that it is possible for prison education effectively to enthuse and engage those who take advantage of it. We were also able to show that those with positive attitudes towards learning tended to achieve higher grades in the ESB examinations and to be rated by nominated officers as having better communication skills after gaining an ESB qualification.

We conclude that the ESB approach to developing communication skills is effective in meeting the needs of learners for competence, autonomy and relatedness.

We have seen that people who lack confidence in oral communication can make rapid progress given favourable conditions. ESB courses provide an authentic framework for the formative assessment of communication and thinking skills. This enables course members to gain in confidence and reach a high level of communicative competence.

We can infer that without such a framework and without high expectations of student potential for growth, assessments of communication and thinking skills are likely to be unreliable.

---

## 11.4

### The case studies

The ESB oral communication course differed from the others we observed in the prominence given to student oral presentations on individually chosen subjects. By building on the interests and experience of learners in this way, ESB courses use prior experience as a resource base on which to build new learning. More than in the other courses we observed, preparing for ESB assessment gives more responsibility for choice and problem solving to the individual learner, while at the same time ensuring a high level of social support through powerful group processes.

The multifaceted yet holistic nature of the ESB approach was reflected in the fact that the session we observed was given overall higher quality ratings than sessions in other courses. No other course session was rated as highly for quality of *group activity*, while no other was given higher ratings for *personalisation*, *interpersonal regard* or *productive thinking*.

The picture built up through our case-study visits is much more positive than that emerging from the ongoing evaluation of basic skills courses by Hurry *et al.* (2005), where work was rarely selected to match students' interests and where class discussion was rarely observed. We conclude that a stronger focus on communication and thinking skills and the wider use of quality indicators of competence, autonomy and relatedness would do much to improve teaching and learning in prison classrooms and workshops.

---

## 11.5

### Some implications for the rehabilitation of offenders

The current policy emphasis on assessing the criminogenic and learning needs of individual offenders drives an approach to rehabilitation which is based on addressing individual deficits. This approach plays down social influences on crime and the power of social factors in rehabilitation. By failing to take account of how social influences can cumulatively limit opportunities for learning, an individual deficit model of criminality runs the risk of labelling people either as being of low ability – cognitively, socially and emotionally – or as having specific learning disabilities. But if measured abilities and attainments can deteriorate over time, they can also improve.

Experiences in prison can increase as well as decrease chances of re-conviction and taking up criminal careers. Much depends on the social influences at work in what can become a 'university of crime' instead of helping to create more positive and prosocial communities of learners. Without social support, individual commitment to activities incompatible with crime is much less likely to occur. A key message from successful approaches to rehabilitation such as the University of Victoria/Simon Fraser educational programme and the Amity therapeutic community is how important it is for prisoners to feel part of a community of learners. Friendship, Falshaw and Beech (2003) came to a similar conclusion with reference to cognitive interventions and listed the following key factors:

- group climate, characterised by high cohesion, good organisation and being well led by facilitators
- encouragement of the open expression of feelings
- a sense of group responsibility
- a sense of hope among group members, coupled with an institutional climate where prison staff are involved in treatment and model appropriate attitudes and behaviour.

Research also tells us that it is equally, if not more, important for prisoners to continue to belong to learning communities after release from prison, whether this takes the form of employment or has a vocational, educational or therapeutic emphasis.

Our survey of international rehabilitation literature leads us to conclude that vocational, educational and cognitive-behavioural approaches to rehabilitation are all worth further study and investment. Recent moves to 'join up' vocational and educational provision are therefore to be welcomed, but as Townsend (1991) and the Prison Reform Trust (2003) argue, this should also be happening in relation to psychological courses. In our view, special treatment should not be given to any one of these approaches to rehabilitation over the others, whether in terms of status, resourcing or control of rehabilitation research.

'Joined-up' services need to be based on shared values and understandings of how people learn, as well as on evidence and good organisation. Our interpretation of the literature is that rehabilitation based on humanistic values can be very effective, especially when it fosters competence, autonomy and relatedness. 'Competence' means much more than the acquisition of knowledge and technical skills. Social and interpersonal skills as well as 'emotional intelligence' are vital to success in personal life and employment.

Because no central records are kept about the relative performance of institutions in terms of re-conviction rates, we do not know how much variation there is in this respect. However, if the rates of re-conviction are half the national average in some prisons (after controlling for relevant predictive variables), they are bound to be much higher than the national average in other prisons. The picture is complicated, because prisoners move between prisons and experience varying combinations of custodial and community sentence, but these factors can be taken into account statistically. The present lack of rehabilitation performance measures for individual prisons leads us to the conclusion that value-added league tables of the rehabilitation performance of prisons would be a useful way of providing feedback to institutions, informing research and guiding policy. The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (HoC CPA 2002) made a similar recommendation in its report entitled *Reducing prisoner reoffending*.

We can have more confidence in research carried out in several institutions rather than in a single prison. However, in England and Wales, the published research into recidivism, whether from large samples or from individual prisons, is not encouraging. The latest evidence is that no significant reductions in recidivism are resulting from cognitive-behavioural, basic skills or therapeutic community programmes. In such circumstances, a rational approach is to find out what is not working as well as 'what works'.

Our contacts with prisons showed that many staff members are under enormous stress, with security issues predominant in their minds. They typically function in isolation from each other, and coherence, continuity and progression in a prisoner's 'learning journey' is the exception rather than the rule. Issues such as the perceived value of education for prisoners, staff training, morale and staff turnover (at all levels) are often problematic.

We found that there are considerable differences between institutions regarding the perceived value of education, and what seems to be crucial in this is the commitment and enthusiasm of particular staff members. We found examples of institutions where there was clear evidence of an ethos which fully supported education: inmates were valued learners and both formal and informal learning were encouraged. An embedded positive ethos was evident in those prisons where all staff appeared to be committed, from the governor downwards. There we also found examples of a commitment to innovative interventions, such as ESB courses. What was striking was the impact a change in senior personnel could have on the educational provision in an institution. Many staff members spoke of how programmes, courses or interventions had been halted because of a change in senior staff; and several staff spoke of the frustration they felt when they had spent years developing and building a particular type of educational provision, only to be told that it would cease once a new governor or senior member of staff had been appointed. Conversely, we were also told on a few occasions where this had worked in the opposite way: a newly appointed staff member had brought enthusiasm, vigour and fresh ideas about educational provision.

The LSC is determined to improve record keeping, continuity of education and training and opportunities for progression when it assumes responsibility for these matters in 2006. In our view, structural changes and new sets of bureaucratic procedures will not be sufficient to create a competent, empowered and integrated workforce. Steps need to be taken across the prison estate to create a culture of enquiry, creativity and initiative, so that staff can learn from and with each other as well as from top-down communications and directives.

Evidence is accumulating that prisoners do not respond well to an overprescriptive approach to instruction, especially in areas where they lack competence. We therefore conclude that existing courses which do not seem to be working very well should be closely examined in terms of their approach to teaching and learning, flexibility of structure and pedagogy.

There are strong arguments, rehearsed elsewhere in this report, for giving greater weight to the development of oral communication skills across the entire area of adult learning, both in instruction and in assessment. This is especially true of instruction in reading and writing, since the need or desire to communicate underlies the use of the alphabetic system. If basic skills instruction fails to promote the habit, if not the love, of reading and writing, it has failed. If researching a topic to be presented or finding out more about a matter of interest that has been discussed encourages reading and writing for a purpose, the more informal oral approach will have succeeded.



**Section 12****Recommendations**

It is inappropriate for us to duplicate the recommendations about learning and skills programmes in prisons that have been made by other bodies in recent years. However, we finish this section by highlighting recommendations from three influential reports which connect with our own conclusions.

We begin with recommendations specific to ESB oral communication courses. We believe that there is sufficient evidence from low re-conviction rates, the improvement of communication skills observed by prison officers, the quality of the course we observed and the views of learners and teachers to justify the expansion of this provision as well as further research into it.

- We recommend that all prisoners should have access either to ESB oral communication courses or to courses with similar components.
- Information about ESB courses should be made available to all prisoners on admission, backed up by access on computer or prison video to recorded sessions, so that key features relating to the sessions and the examinations are understood.
- Accredited ESB courses should be made available more widely in community settings, where they may help to engage disaffected young people in learning and enable prisoners to progress to higher levels after release.
- All courses should discuss how to use and build on improved communication skills in different contexts (including the prison environment).
- Oral communication tutors should work closely with key colleagues in other departments and establish links with the Probation Service and outside providers of education and training.
- The ESB should mount a publicity campaign so that more employers and community agencies appreciate the value of qualifications in oral communication.
- Research should be carried out with larger samples than in the present study to find out which prisoners most need ESB oral communication courses and will get the greatest benefit from them.
- Pilot projects should be set up in which ESB oral communication courses are made a sentence-plan requirement for certain groups with a high risk of re-conviction; for example, prisoners with short sentences.
- Research should be carried out to compare stand-alone ways of running ESB oral communication courses with delivery which embeds the activities in other subject areas.
- The potential of an oral communication course to act as a bridge into further learning should be investigated.
- There should be a test of the hypothesis that after successfully completing an ESB oral communication course, prisoners are less likely to be involved in violent incidents.
- Research should be undertaken to find out whether ESB courses, especially those with a vocational aspect, help prisoners to gain and keep employment.

We now turn to the broader context of education and training in prisons, but maintain our focus on oral communication and thinking. We address curricular and pedagogical issues, assessment, staff training and professional development.

- The development of oral communication skills should be given greater prominence in relation to written communication skills in a wide range of accredited courses for adult learners.
- For prisoners with low levels of prior attainment, oral communication should be seen as an essential part of the learning journey, not as an 'add-on'.
- More use should be made of group work and peer support methods in the education and training of offenders.
- Greater use should be made of learning through enquiry, including collaborative research and discussion, in the education and training of offenders.
- The development of thinking skills within and across subject areas should become an explicit goal in prison education and training, and should feature strongly in ILPs.
- Initial assessment of oral communication and thinking skills should be formative in nature and should be based on performance in a range of familiar settings.
- When assessing oral communication and thinking skills, prison educators and trainers should use a range of formative and summative approaches, including teacher assessment, self-assessment, peer assessment, group assessment and external assessment.
- All staff working in prisons should focus on learning and instruction as part of their initial training and should have personal experience of powerful pedagogical strategies.
- Oral communication and group work should be part of a common core of experiential initial training which is shared by prison educators, mental health workers, prison officers, psychologists and trainers.
- Active learning approaches to professional development should be encouraged, including action research, practitioner-led seminars, coaching, drama and group work.
- Shared professional development across disciplines should focus on key areas such as institutional purpose and vision, collaborative practitioner research, learner motivation, access to resources to support learning, transferable knowledge and skills, and self-regulation.
- A research project should be set up to evaluate learner-centred approaches to literacy instruction which build on oral communication and personal interests.
- Research should be carried out to find out which (if any) quality indicators in education and training – for example, personalisation, interpersonal regard, group activity, productive thinking and the principles of andragogy (see Section 3) – predict positive outcomes for offenders.

Finally, because they are especially relevant to the present study, we wish to highlight the following recommendations which have been made by other bodies: the House of Commons Committee on Public Accounts (HoC CPA 2002, henceforth referred to as HOC1), the Prison Reform Trust (2003, henceforth PRT) and the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (HoC ESC 2005, henceforth HOC2).

### **The value of education and training**

- The Government should be aiming to develop a culture within prisons in which education and skills are a priority. (HOC2)
- Prison governors should encourage and join in events to celebrate the achievements of prisoner-learners in education and training. (PRT)
- The breadth of the education curriculum is important and employability skills should not be emphasised to such an extent that the wider benefits of learning are excluded. (HOC2)
- Education and training should have equal status with offending behaviour [programmes] and other correctional programmes. (PRT)

### **The curriculum: coherence, continuity and progression**

- The OLSU and providers of education should consult regularly with prisoner-learners... education staff, prison staff and governors on the quality, quantity and relevance of learning provision. (PRT)
- Whilst aiming to meet the basic skills needs of prisoners the Government must endeavour to broaden out the prison education curriculum and increase flexibility of provision to meet the much wider range of educational needs that exists within the prison system. (HOC2)
- The Government needs to... commit to the continuity of provision of education and training on release. (HOC2)
- Training should extend beyond prison release, including personal presentational skills and interview techniques. (HOC)

### **Staff training and professional development**

- The OLSU should develop more practical ways for education staff, prison staff and providers of education to learn from each other. (PRT)
- All prison education staff should be supported by and be required to participate in annual programmes for continuing professional development. (PRT)
- The initial training period of 8 weeks for prison officers... must be significantly increased to a level that reflects an appropriate investment to enable prison officers to play a key role in the education and training of prisoners. (HOC2)
- Prison officer 'education champions' for each wing should be recruited, trained and supported by education managers in order to enhance, encourage and support learning opportunities for prisoners on the wings, including cell study. (PRT)

## **Research and development**

- The concept of the prison as a learning environment for prisoners and staff should be the subject of further research and development. (PRT)
- We urge the Government to give priority to undertaking the necessary research to demonstrate the impact of education and training on recidivism. (HOC2)
- The Prison Service should identify measures to enable it to routinely compare the success of individual prisons in reducing reoffending so it can build on best practice and bring about improvements where necessary. (HOC1)
- We urge the Government to undertake thorough and robust research to identify what type of education and training provision will have the greatest impact on meeting the individual learning needs of the prisoner and providing them with real alternatives to crime on release. (HOC2)
- Working with the probation service, the voluntary sector, and others, the Prison Service should develop programmes which meet the needs of short-term prisoners. (HOC1)

## **Promising approaches**

- We... urge the Government to look at significantly increasing the role of mentoring in prison education, including supporting existing successful programmes on a national basis. (HOC2)
- We recommend that the Government undertake[s] a thorough review of the different charities working in the prison sector and those that are successful are given national recognition, funding, support, and enter the quality assurance regime. (HOC2)

**Appendix 1****Case study at HMP Millwood:  
ESB Oral Communication Course  
Level 1**

---

**Introduction**

This phase of the research aims to address the following research question:

**What are the distinctive features of ESB courses compared with other courses which make significant demands on thinking?**

This is one of four case studies in different prisons, which have been sampled based on the variety and selection of courses and activities available. Each case study focuses on a particular type of course with a strong emphasis on thinking skills and/or oral communication.

The research approaches involved in the prison case studies include the following:

- observation of session(s) of a course/activity
- focus-group discussions with course participants
- interviews or discussions with prison staff and tutors involved in course delivery
- document collation and collection.

---

**The prison**

HMP Millwood is a training prison for sentenced Category C adult male prisoners. Managed by HM Prison Service, HMP Millwood is located on a site that was previously a Royal Air Force (RAF) airfield. The prison's operational capacity stands at 607, which includes 80 life-sentenced prisoners. Millwood houses both a Category C prison, which opened in 1985, and an immigration removal centre. The immigration removal centre operates separately from the prison and is not considered within this case study.

In March 2003, HMP Millwood was subject to a full announced inspection by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Commenting on this, the chief inspector said (HMIP 2003):

*Millwood, in general, was amongst the best training prisons of its type that we have inspected recently. However, it contained a single wing, H-wing, which was amongst the worst we have visited recently. The sadness is that this overshadows excellent work elsewhere in the prison, excellence matched in few other parts of the category C training estate.*

A later report of an unannounced inspection in June 2004 (HMIP 2004) commented favourably upon the amount of purposeful activity which took place with regard to education and employment. The report highlighted the expansion of accredited training and the integration of activities with resettlement provision. Since that inspection, further facilities and training opportunities have been added.

With funding support from Eastshire Forward, the Regional Development Agency (RDA), a purpose-built construction industry training facility was formally opened in October 2004. This was the first of its kind within the Prison Service. In addition, Eastshire Forward provided funds for a new bakery, which aims to allow prisoners to gain recognised baking qualifications. A shortage of skilled bakers in the region prompted the establishment of this facility.

## The course

This case study focuses on the ESB oral communication courses which have been running at HMP Millwood since January 2001. HMP Millwood currently offers examined courses at Vocational Levels 1 to 3 and has two ESB-trained tutors. Originally, the prison received National Lottery funding for materials and accreditation fees. However, this is no longer the case and associated costs must now be met from the prison education budget.

ESB courses at HMP Millwood usually run over a 10-week period, with weekly sessions lasting for approximately 90 minutes with a comfort break in the middle. The groups generally consist of around 12–15 men with one tutor in attendance. The preliminary sessions consist of icebreakers, which are used to encourage both speaking and listening skills within the group. Creating a climate of mutual support is a central tenet of this course and the enthusiastic tutors skilfully achieve this. As the course progresses, there is more emphasis on the skills required to deliver a successful oral presentation. Throughout the course, prisoners are encouraged to work towards a formal assessment, which is administered by an external examiner from the ESB's national team.

The nature of the assessment is a key feature of this course. Everyone who takes part in the assessment does so both as a presenter and as a member of the audience. The ESB examiner gives verbal feedback to the group on the day and each candidate receives an individual narrative report. Successful candidates receive a certificate within approximately 6 weeks, giving qualification title, level and grade of pass.

Given the tutor's emphasis on creating a climate of mutual support, this approach ensures that peer support is evident in the assessment process.

Between January 2001 and November 2004, 56 Vocational Grade ESB qualifications in oral communication were awarded. Table 12 shows the grades achieved and the level of study.

12 As from 2004, the grading bands were reduced from five to three.

**Table 12**

ESB qualifications gained at HMP Millwood 2001–2004<sup>12</sup>

	Distinction	Credit/Merit	Very good pass	Total
<b>Vocational Level 1</b>	14	12	5	31
<b>Vocational Level 2</b>	9	5		14
<b>Vocational Level 3</b>	7	4		11

Recruitment to the courses is done through active promotion of the course by the course tutors. Some of the course members are recruited via literacy courses, which one of the ESB tutors delivers. Currently, the courses do not feature as part of a sentence plan and therefore all attendees are volunteers. An increasing number of prisoners are joining courses after working in the prison gym. These men are cognisant of the benefits that the course offers should they seek employment in the fitness sector on release.

---

## Methodology and data collection

Two members of the research team – Jen Miller and David Moseley – completed the fieldwork and data collection for this case study. This was a second visit to this prison for one of the team members, who, prior to this visit, had observed the external examination process.

All staff and the prisoners that they met at HMP Millwood were exceptionally helpful and enthusiastic about the research and made the researchers feel very welcome.

As the researchers were limited to paper and pens as their tools for research, they were heavily reliant on each other. In other environments, they have used apparatus such as tape-recorders, observation software, laptops, etc, all of which were, understandably, not permitted within the prison. One person would take notes while the other person conducted an interview or discussion and *vice versa*. Both researchers took notes during the observation of the course session.

---

## Observation

Observation of one session of the course was completed. At the time of the visit, the course was three sessions into the programme.

There were 11 prisoners attending the session, along with their tutor. This observation looked at the format of the session, the role of the tutor and attendee participation.

---

## Documentation

The course tutor made the following information available:

- figures on the number of prisoners who had successfully completed the course
- previous course evaluation forms (sample of 20 completed)
- external examiner's feedback sheets (sample of 18).



---

## The session

The session took place in the education block within a classroom with very basic resources. Although the prisoners were working towards a final assessment that requires them to give a presentation, there was no digital equipment available to use in the presentation or for gathering information or informing their choice of topic.

The session started calmly with the students seated in a horseshoe arrangement. The tutor had a very good rapport with the course members and they referred to him as 'their hero'. The lesson began with a recap by the tutor of the previous session; he then elicited from the group the constituent parts of an oral presentation of the kind on which they will later be examined. The tutor used a spider diagram to show the parts of a presentation and the course members were encouraged to elaborate. They contributed in an orderly fashion and showed evidence of retaining what had been taught previously. Having completed the diagram, the tutor asked how they all *felt* about giving their final presentations. The following responses were given:

**Prisoner 1** *Pressure... Worried I'll get confused... Scariest thing I've ever had to do.*

**Prisoner 2** *Nervous... Don't think I know how.*

**Prisoner 3** *Don't like being centre of attention... Nervous.*

**Prisoner 4** *Worried about the timescale to get prepared.*

**Prisoner 5** *Afraid the audience won't interact... Worried about being put on the spot... Don't want to fail...*

**Prisoner 6** *Embarrassed at the thought of giving a presentation.*

The tutor then assured the group that they would be supported by each other and by him. Throughout the session, there was an emphasis on group support and building up confidence through manageable, well-staged tasks to ensure success.

The next part of the session involved each person sharing with the group their chosen topic. At the previous session, the attendees had been instructed to think about the topic they wished to cover in their presentation and to come prepared with a title to this session. Most course members arrived having selected a topic, although a few had still to make a final decision.

One person had decided on the Hillsborough Disaster as his subject and proceeded to inform the group of his beliefs about the incident. This resulted in a considerable amount of loud comment from others, with random statements being added to the account given by the original proposer. The tutor pointed out to the group that what was being voiced contained fact, supposition and some deeply held beliefs. He used the preceding dialogue to illustrate the need for an organised approach to the presentation and the need to differentiate between fact and beliefs.



Once the course members had discussed their proposed topics, the tutor moved on to a task that involved each person selecting (unseen) a topic from a bag and then talking on the subject for 1 minute. Everyone attempted this and most talked for the minute, including the unfortunate person who selected 'cement' as his topic. The tutor used this experience to show how difficult it is to give a presentation when you have limited knowledge of a subject and have been given very little time to prepare.

The final part of the session involved each course member giving a talk about another person in the group. In the previous session, each had been assigned a partner and given the task of preparing to tell the others about that person. Following on from this, the tutor allowed group members time to reflect on the talks they had just given and think about why it was easier than the 1-minute talk given previously. The following responses were given:

**Prisoner 1** *You didn't feel like you were being set up to fail.*

**Prisoner 2** *We had a week to prepare.*

**Prisoner 3** *I had my outline to work from.*

**Prisoner 4** *I was confident I knew what I was talking about.*

**Prisoner 5** *I had a structure to work from.*

**Prisoner 6** *It wasn't my first time.*

Throughout the session, the tutor skilfully linked past experiences with new experiences and asked group members to reflect on what they had just learned. He built a supportive climate within the group while giving them the tools and techniques required to prepare for the final assessment. There was both support and challenge within the session, along with a good deal of humour.

---

### Previous course evaluations

Previous course evaluations indicate the level of challenge experienced by some prisoners.

**Chris** *It was nerve-racking for me reading aloud in front of the class.*

**David** *The speaking element was much harder than I expected, but I found it a fulfilling experience.*

**Lee** *I was very nervous when I had to get up in front of the class.*

**Mick** *I found it daunting to stand in front of an audience.*

**Dean** *I really struggled doing presentations.*

**Elliot** *I think the course should be longer as there is so much to take in.*

**Simon** *The time factor was a problem. There was so much to prepare for the final assessment – I wish it had been longer.*

Without exception, the course evaluations praised the tutor's teaching skills. One course member wrote: 'The teaching given on this course is exceptional and the only true group teaching I've witnessed in the whole of Millwood Education Centre.' While another wrote: 'Stewart makes sure we understand everything and breaks things down if we don't. He has a great sense of humour, so the subject is never boring.'

---

## Indicators of quality

The observers agreed on the following account, which paints a very positive picture of the quality of the learning experience.

### Personalisation

*The teacher knows each member of the group well:*  
the tutor knows each inmate well and in most instances, has personally encouraged the inmate to join the course.

*Group members are able to make choices concerning tasks:*  
this was true insofar as each individual was expected to choose their topic for the final presentations. This freedom gives the inmate the opportunity to carry out research in the library and prepare a presentation on a subject that interests them. The range of topics chosen in the past is diverse and includes such subjects as Alexander the Great, Iran, mushrooms, canals, *The Titanic*, *The Lord of the Rings*, the Nile crocodile and golf.

*The teacher modifies questioning to ensure understanding:*  
there was clear evidence of this during the session we observed, as occasionally the group members did not grasp the questions or explanations of the tasks straight away.

*No member of the group feels unable to make a contribution:*  
all group members contributed in the observed session. All attempted the impromptu 1-minute talk, although some did not talk for the full minute. The group members were attentive when others were presenting (although not always when someone was talking in a context outside a presentation). The tutor encouraged participation without putting undue pressure on the quieter members of the group. In the observed session, the tutor skilfully managed the group to allow everyone the opportunity to talk.

*The teacher evaluates progress on an individual basis:*  
the tutor was observed giving feedback after each of the presentations and encouraged the group to give feedback to individual presenters. Neither the tutor nor the inmates gave negative feedback. Course evaluations refer to the positive support given by fellow inmates and indicate that this is a valued element of the course.

### Interpersonal regard

*There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and regard:*  
this was well established and apart from the occasional outburst (only seen early on in the session), the group supported and encouraged each other. The tutor views the development of mutual respect as essential in the course. He modelled this type of behaviour in his teaching.

*Patience is shown by the teacher and some group members:*  
this was evident during the session we observed. When one individual who appeared to have quite profound learning difficulties was struggling, the remainder of the group waited patiently while the tutor explained a point he had misunderstood.

*There are some signs of willingness and good humour:* there was little evidence of reluctance to participate, and whenever the tutor asked for volunteers, there were always group members who were willing. Those who were less than willing were cajoled into participating by the other inmates. Throughout the session, there were humorous comments both from the tutor and members of the group.

*No one who makes a mistake is ridiculed:* the tutor would not tolerate this and no behaviour of this type was witnessed, even when one participant had to abort his unprepared presentation. As most, if not all, of the inmates had not previously made a presentation to an audience, they expected to make mistakes. The evaluation forms indicate that some inmates appear to understand that making mistakes is part of the learning process.

*Teacher evaluation is supportive:* continuously throughout the session, the tutor evaluated and praised group members.

### **Group activity**

*Seating facilitates interaction:* this was certainly true. The tutor did not determine where the inmates sat. The classroom was set out with the desks in a horseshoe position and while there were spare chairs, all inmates chose to sit next to one another. The horseshoe formation meant that everyone could interact with other group members as well as with the tutor.

*The teacher has explicit social aims (eg cooperation):* the tutor frequently referred to ways in which the students could support each other, as well as to the social value of improved communication skills. The tutor encouraged participation and contributions from all members of the group and during the observed session, he was successful in achieving this aim.

*The teacher facilitates communication among group members:* this was certainly true, in that each person was expected to contribute by relating their own experiences and by joining in the discussion. In the session we observed, the tutor's main role appeared to be one of facilitator rather than teacher. There was certainly more talk from the group than from the teacher.

*Members of the group sometimes take the lead or initiate:* making a presentation and answering questions on it ensures that all group members have the experience of taking a lead role.

*Group members are free to disagree with the teacher's ideas:* although the tutor gave clear advice about what makes a good presentation, one group member, in particular, did not fully agree. He and the tutor agreed to differ on certain points. When the Hillsborough Disaster was under consideration, there was considerable debate within the group and with the tutor about the 'facts' of the disaster. Also, the tutor did try to steer one person away from his choice of topic for the final presentation. The inmate did stand his ground and refused to relinquish 'The Colosseum' as his preferred choice of topic.

*The group is cohesive and members are interdependent:* this was strongly in evidence, with all members wanting everyone to succeed and being respectful and considerate to each other. They had prepared well in pairs to offer appreciative descriptions of each other.

*All members are seen to cooperate:* all participants were fully engaged in the session and were never seen to put someone else down. Instead they were positive throughout in supporting each other's efforts.

*There is shared decision making:* decisions about choice of topic for the final presentations were left ultimately to the prisoners themselves. However, the tutor contributed to those decisions through his clear guidance and feedback.

*Conflicts are resolved in the group:* there was no evidence of conflict during the session we observed, only a difference of opinion.

*Group members contribute to the evaluation of others:* there are several ways in which this is done, ranging from non-verbal reactions, through the contributions of others, to appreciative comments and the quality of the questions and discussion following a presentation.

## **Productive thinking**

*There is time to think things through:* during the session, there were examples of extended discussion about topics and how to make a presentation work for an audience. When more time is required, homework tasks are set; for example, a presentation is planned and prepared, often with assistance and feedback from peers.

*There are opportunities for speculation and discovery:* opportunities for discovery certainly exist throughout the course, notably through researching topics to be presented. In the session observed, the performances of group members and their accounts of how they were feeling allowed everyone to find out more about personal strengths and weaknesses.

*Group members sometimes work out and defend their own views:* there were clear examples of this, one example being a defence by one group member of his personal style of presentation.

*There is evidence of planning and/or reflection by group members:* the course puts a strong emphasis on planning and encourages participants to reflect both on their feelings and the barriers to success. Much of the course content is to do with managing information and planning for a coherent presentation to a group. Course members are encouraged to use strategies such as the use of cue cards to help to organise their thinking and to aid their presentation skills.

*The teacher draws attention to productive thinking:* there was little evidence of this throughout the session we observed.

## Appendix 2

Summarised results of the 2003 postal survey,  
showing which types of course are thought to help  
develop thinking skills**Table 13**

A-rated courses, where  
the primary aim is to  
develop thinking

**A-rated courses**

<b>Main category</b>	<b>Course name or type</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Psychological courses</b>	Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS)	29
	Drugs and alcohol	21
	Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R)	14
	Anger management	9
	Assertiveness	8
	Other psychological courses	6
	Social and life skills	5
	Motivating Offenders to Rethink Everything (MORE)	4
	Other thinking skills courses	4
	Cognitive Self Change Programme (CSCP)	3
	Family-related courses	3
	Sycamore Project	2
	Problem Solving	2
	Dyslexia	1
	Resettlement and release programmes	1
	Personal development	1
	Sex-offender treatment programme	1
	Consequences and Victim Empathy (CAVE)	1
	Stress-related courses	1
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Educational courses</b>	General education	12
	Literacy and numeracy	10
	Citizenship	5
	Communication	4
	Arts-related courses	2
	Health-related courses	2
	Information technology	2
	Basic skills	1
	Business-related courses	1
	Personal development	1
	Food-related courses	1
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Vocational courses</b>	Work-related courses	3
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Total A-rated courses</b>		<b>160</b>

**Table 14**

B-rated courses,  
which aim to develop  
transferable skills

**B-rated courses**

<b>Main category</b>	<b>Course name or type</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Psychological courses</b>	Social and life skills	10
	Drugs and alcohol	8
	Family-related courses	8
	Anger management	6
	Assertiveness	5
	Resettlement and release programmes	5
	Group work	4
	Other psychological courses	3
	Personal development	2
	Problem Solving	2
	Motivating Offenders to Rethink Everything (MORE)	2
	Basic skills	1
	Stress-related programmes	1
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Educational courses</b>	Literacy and numeracy	44
	Arts-related courses	17
	Information technology	17
	Key skills	14
	General education	11
	Basic skills	8
	Communication	7
	Business-related courses	7
	Food-related courses	4
	Citizenship	4
	Sports-related courses	4
	Languages	1
	Family-related courses	1
	Health-related courses	1
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Vocational courses</b>	Work-related courses	34
	Business-related courses	4
	Sports-related courses	4
	Food-related courses	3
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Total B-rated courses</b>		<b>242</b>

**Table 15**

C-rated courses,  
where thinking skills  
are required

<b>C-rated courses</b>		
<b>Main category</b>	<b>Course name or type</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Psychological courses</b>	Social and life skills	10
	Family-related courses	3
	Sycamore Project	3
	Drugs and alcohol	4
	Assertiveness	2
	Sex-offender treatment programme	2
	Victim awareness	1
	Anger management	1
	Other psychological courses	1
	Cognitive Self Change Programme (CSCP)	1
	Personal development	1
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Educational courses</b>	General education	12
	Literacy and numeracy	10
	Arts-related courses	8
	Family-related courses	6
	Information technology	6
	Business-related courses	3
	Communication	3
	Citizenship	2
	Basic skills	1
	Social and life skills	1
	Languages	1
	Health-related courses	1
	Resettlement and release programmes	1
	Sports-related courses	1
	Food-related courses	1
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Vocational courses</b>	Work-related courses	12
	Business-related courses	2
	Food-related courses	1
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Total C-rated courses</b>		<b>101</b>

- The atomic bomb
- The bomb
- Birds of prey
- Energy systems
- German Shepherd dogs
- Healthy eating
- High-performance cars
- Imran Khan
- Judo
- Preparation for war
- Martin Luther King
- Mushrooms
- The Prince's Trust
- Sheffield United Football Club
- The skeleton
- Wimbledon



**Appendix 4****A telephone interview with one of the ESB tutors at HMP Grangehurst**

**Question** What is special about ESB compared with other courses?

**Answer** It is oral and this makes it very relevant for prisoners, but also very scary, because they find giving a talk a problem. But it gives them a great sense of achievement – particularly because it is a graded test – most courses now, it is just pass or fail, but this tells them how well they have done and they like that. It is a very sympathetic process and not like any other exam – they are part of a group with the tutor and the examiner is part of the group as well. It builds inner confidence and feels good – they get a blast out of it unlike other tests – it gets very positive reactions from all the candidates. It reinforces inner confidence and pays off in other assessments.

One prisoner said that ESB was good, as ‘English to blag the Old Bill with, isn’t it?’ They learn to manage their body language, make eye contact and control their voices.

Prison staff like ESB – they can see the difference when a prisoner had done it – helps them to be calmer and more open to persuading rather than getting angry and incoherent.

**Q** What is different about ESB courses pedagogically?

**A** It is not didactic – you demonstrate and model, facilitate, use each individual candidate’s strengths to the maximum and guide them. They are part of a group and teachers encourage and support them – empathy is important.

**Q** What kinds of thinking are involved in preparing and giving presentations?

**A** They plan and think about the tools they will need for transferring information. Key things are prioritising and thinking ahead: they have often never planned anything out logically before. They need to think about other people: what will interest them, how can they get them engaged and listening to what they have to say. They plan out resources and how to get them and use them effectively. They develop skills they can transfer to other settings – I have found this with students taking vocational courses where they need to instruct.

**Q** How do you go about getting a high success rate?

**A** The basic model is to explain to them why this is important and how they can use it; eg I can teach you how to write a CV, but that gets you the interview, not the job. ESB can get you the job, because you will communicate effectively. It is a different way of working and it allows inmates to approach things in their own way, from their own interests. It meets long-standing needs; eg many prisoners are telephone-phobic, but seeing peers do this part of the ESB exam gives them the confidence to have a go. Giving it a go is the essence of ESB. Education is not a profitable choice for prisoners in the short term – they can earn more in the workshops – but they respond to encouragement and demonstration and news of the course is passed on by word of mouth – the best recommendation.

**Q** [Can you give] a particular example of where it has made a difference to an individual?

**A** One chap left education after doing ESB and later came over to the block with a manuscript – he had written an essay on *Othello* because another inmate had used a speech in an ESB presentation and this had inspired him to read Shakespeare for the first time. He was not following any formal course – he just got interested. Later he came back with a comparison of Shylock and the [character the] Jew of Malta, after reading that Marlowe had written *[The] Jew of Malta* first and he wanted to see if Shakespeare had nicked his ideas. You can't measure things like that, he was not going in for any qualification, it was just that ESB had opened a door – he found something absorbing.

**Q** What changes would you like to see so that you can build on success?

**A** Include oral communication in the key performance targets and use ESB for any spoken element. ESB is an expensive option compared to the test done now, but it is invaluable because of the wide-reaching impact on prisoners. It is suitable for all prisoners and there is no optimum time in the sentence – it is important to go with what the prisoner wants – when they are ready and have chosen to do it.

I object to the new move to assess and put prisoners on programmes within 2 weeks of being admitted – it's too soon, there's no time for them to adjust and come round to seeing what they might need. Motivation is essential and as much choice as possible. We have an open access policy for ESB and this is part of why it works.

## References

- Bell R, Conard EH, Gazze B, Greenwood SC, Lutz JG and Suppa RJ (1983). *The nature and prevalence of learning deficiencies among adult inmates*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice.
- Bennett G (2004). Release to what? *Prison Report*, 64, 29.
- Black P and Wiliam D (1998). *Inside the black box: raising standards through classroom assessment*. London: School of Education, King's College London.
- Brown K (2002). *The right to learn: alternatives for a Learning Society*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Cann J, Falshaw L, Nugent F and Friendship C (2003). *Understanding what works: accredited cognitive skills programmes for adult men and young offenders*. Home Office Online Findings No 226. At [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r226.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r226.pdf), accessed 7 November 2005.
- Clark D (2001). *Effective regimes measurement research*. Unpublished Prison Service internal management paper. London: Home Office.
- Clarke A, Simmonds R and Wydall S (2004). *Delivering cognitive skills programmes in prison: a qualitative study*. Home Office Online Report No 24/04. Available via [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds), accessed 7 November 2005.
- Coffield F, Moseley D, Hall E and Ecclestone K (2004a). *Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning: a systematic and critical review*. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.
- Coffield F, Moseley D, Hall E and Ecclestone K (2004b). *Should we be using learning styles? What research has to say to practice*. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.
- Colliver JA (2000). The effectiveness of problem-based learning curricula: research and theory. *Academic Medicine*, 75, 259–266.
- Davies K, Lewis J, Byatt J, Purvis E and Cole B (2004). *An evaluation of the literacy demands of general offending behaviour programmes*. Home Office Online Findings No 233. At [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/rfpubs1.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/rfpubs1.html), accessed 7 November 2005.
- Davis G, Caddick B, Lyon K, Doling L, Hasler J, Webster A, Reed M and Ford K (1997). *Addressing the literacy needs of offenders under probation supervision*. London: Home Office.
- De Leon G, Melnick G, Thomas G, Kressel D and Wexler HK (2000). Motivation for treatment in a prison-based therapeutic community – statistical data included. *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 26(1), 23–46.
- Dewey J (1933). *How we think: a restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the reflective process*, revised edition. Boston: Heath.
- DfES/Home Office/DWP (2005). *Reducing re-offending through skills and education*. Green Paper. Norwich: The Stationery Office.

- Dowden C, Blanchette K and Serin R (1999). *Anger management programming for federal male inmates: an effective intervention*. Ottawa: Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada.
- Duguid S (1998). *British Columbia Prison Education Research Project final report*. Vancouver, BC: Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University. At [www.sfu.ca/humanities/ifeps/PERP6.doc](http://www.sfu.ca/humanities/ifeps/PERP6.doc).
- Dyslexia Institute (2005). *The incidence of hidden disabilities in the prison population: Yorkshire & Humberside Research Project*. Egham: The Dyslexia Institute.
- Edgar K and Martin C (2000). *Conflicts and violence in prison: research findings*. At [www1.rhbc.ac.uk/sociopolitical-science/vrp/Findings/rfedgar.pdf](http://www1.rhbc.ac.uk/sociopolitical-science/vrp/Findings/rfedgar.pdf), accessed 1 November 2005.
- Edgar K, O'Donnell I and Martin C (2002). *Prison violence: the dynamics of conflict, fear and power*. Uffculme: Willan Publishing.
- English Speaking Board (2002a). *Developing oral communications in HM Prisons: final report*. Southport: English Speaking Board (International) Ltd.
- English Speaking Board (2002b). *Handbook for centres and examiners: vocational core and sectors*. Southport: English Speaking Board (International) Ltd.
- Falshaw L, Friendship C, Travers R and Nugent F (2003). *Searching for 'what works': an evaluation of cognitive skills programmes*. Home Office Online Findings No 206. At [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r206.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r206.pdf), accessed 7 November 2005.
- Friendship C, Blud L, Erikson M, Travers R and Thornton D (2003). Cognitive behavioural treatment for imprisoned offenders: an evaluation of HM Prison Service's cognitive skills programmes. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 8, 103–114.
- Friendship C, Falshaw L and Beech AR (2003). Measuring the real impact of accredited offending behaviour programmes. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 8, 115–127.
- Geertz C (2000). *Available light: anthropological reflections on philosophical topics*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Gendreau P and Ross RR (1983). *Success in corrections: programs and principles*. In *Juvenile Justice*, ed. RR Corrado. Toronto, ON: Butterworths.
- Hall I, Hardman F, Smith F and Taverner S (1999). The relevance of GCSE Mathematics and English as preparation for employment. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 51(2), 283–305.
- Higgins S, Baumfield V, Lin M, Moseley D, Butterworth M, Downey G, Gregson M, Oberski I, Rockett M and Thacker D (2004). *Thinking skills approaches to effective teaching and learning: what is the evidence for impact on learners?* Available via the Research Evidence in Education Library website at <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPIWeb/home.aspx?page=/reel/intro.htm>, accessed 7 November 2005.

- HMIP (2003). *Millwood – much improved but one unsafe wing*. London: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.
- HMIP (2004). *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP 'Millwood' 21–23 June 2004* by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. London: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.
- HMIP (2005). *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP 'Grangehurst' 2–4 November 2004* by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. London: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.
- HM Prison Service (2002). *Reducing prisoner reoffending: report by the Comptroller and Auditor General*. London: The Stationery Office.
- HM Prison Service (2004). *Annual report and accounts*. London: The Stationery Office. At [www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/resourcecentre/publicationsdocuments/index.asp?cat=38](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/resourcecentre/publicationsdocuments/index.asp?cat=38), accessed 3 November 2005.
- HoC (2000). House of Commons written answer (Blantyre House: reconviction rates). At [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199900/ldhansrd/vo000523/text/00523w01.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199900/ldhansrd/vo000523/text/00523w01.htm), accessed 7 November 2005.
- HoC CPA (2002). *Reducing prisoner reoffending*. Fifty-third report of session 2001–02. House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts. London: The Stationery Office.
- HoC ESC (2005). *Prison education*. Seventh report of session 2004–05, Volume 1. House of Commons Education and Skills Committee. London: The Stationery Office.
- Hogarth T, Wilson RA, Shury J, Vivian D and Winterbotham M (2004). *National Employers Skills Survey 2003: key findings*. Coventry: Learning and Skills Council.
- Hurry J, Brazier L, Snapes K and Wilson A (2005). *Improving the literacy and numeracy of disaffected young people in custody and in the community*. London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.
- Kiser GC (1987). Disciplinary problems among inmate college students. *Federal Probation*, 51(1), 42–48.
- Knowles M (1970). *The modern practice of adult education: andragogy versus pedagogy*. New York, NY: Association Press.
- Krapp A (2005). Basic needs and the development of interest and intrinsic motivational orientations. *Learning and Instruction*, 15(5), 381–395.
- Lipman M (2003). *Thinking in education*, 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipsey M (1992). Juvenile delinquency treatment: a meta-analytic inquiry into the variability of effects. In *Meta-analysis for explanation: a casebook*, eds TJ Cook, H Cooper, DS Cordray, H Hartman, LV Hedges, RJ Light, TA Louis and F Mosteller, 83–127. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Livingston K, Soden R and Kirkwood M (2004).  
*Post-16 pedagogy and thinking skills: an evaluation*. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.
- Marshall P (1997).  
*A reconviction study of HMP Grendon therapeutic community*. Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate, Research Findings No 53. London: Home Office.
- Martinson R (1974).  
What works? Questions and answers about prison reform.  
*The Public Interest*, 10, 22–54.
- Mezirow J (1991).  
*Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Moseley DV, Baumfield V, Higgins S, Lin M, Miller J, Newton D, Robson S, Elliott J and Gregson M (2004).  
*Thinking skill frameworks for post-16 learners: an evaluation*. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.
- Newman AP, Lewis W and Beverstock C (1993).  
*Prison literacy: implications for program and assessment policy*. National Centre on Adult Literacy Technical Report TR93–1. Bloomington, IN: National Centre on Adult Literacy/ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills.
- NOMS (2005).  
*The national reducing re-offending delivery plan*. At [www.noms.homeoffice.gov.uk/downloads/National\\_Reducing\\_Re-offending\\_Delivery\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.noms.homeoffice.gov.uk/downloads/National_Reducing_Re-offending_Delivery_Plan.pdf), accessed 12 December 2005.
- Nuffield J (1982).  
*Parole decision-making in Canada: research towards decision guidelines*. Ottawa: Solicitor General of Canada.
- Olson MN (1970).  
Classroom variables that predict school system quality. *Research Bulletin, Institute of Administrative Research*, 11(1). New York, NY: Teachers' College, Columbia University.
- OLSU (2005a).  
*Offenders' Learning and Skills Service for adults and juveniles: delivery framework for England*. Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit working document. At [www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning/uploads/docs/OLASS%20Delivery%20Framework.doc](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning/uploads/docs/OLASS%20Delivery%20Framework.doc), accessed 7 November 2005.
- OLSU (2005b).  
*The offender's learning journey: learning and skills provision for adult offenders in England*. Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit. At: [www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning/uploads/docs/adult%20OLJ%20V0.5.doc](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/offenderlearning/uploads/docs/adult%20OLJ%20V0.5.doc), accessed 7 November 2005.
- Pawson R (2000).  
The evaluator's tale. In *Prison(er) education: stories of change and transformation*, eds D Wilson and A Reuss, 62–82. Winchester: Waterside Press.
- Pintrich PR (2000).  
The role of goal orientation in self-regulated learning. In *Handbook of self-regulation*, eds M Boekaerts, PR Pintrich and M Zeidner, 451–502. London: Academic Press.



- Porporino FJ and Robinson D (1992). *Can educating adult offenders counteract recidivism?* Research Report No R-22. Ottawa, OT: Communications Branch, Correctional Service of Canada.
- Prison Reform Trust (2003). *Time to learn: prisoners' views on prison education*. London: Prison Reform Trust.
- Pumphrey J and Slater J (2002). *An assessment of generic skills needs*. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.
- Raynor P and Vanstone M (1996). Reasoning and rehabilitation in Britain: the results of the Straight Thinking on Probation (STOP) programme. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 40, 272–284.
- Reason R, Frederickson N, Heffernan M, Martin C and Woods K (1999). *Dyslexia, literacy and psychological assessment (report by a working party of the Division of Educational and Child Psychology of the British Psychological Society)*. Leicester: The British Psychological Society.
- RDS NOMS (2004). *Offender management caseload statistics 2003*. Offender management analysis section of RDS website. London: The Home Office. Available via [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds), accessed 3 November 2005.
- Rice M, Howes M and Connell P (1998). *The prison reading survey: a report to HM Prison Service planning group*. Cambridge: Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge.
- Robertson G and Gunn J (1987). A ten-year follow-up of men discharged from Grendon Prison. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 151, 674–678.
- Robinson D and Porporino FJ (2001). Programming in cognitive skills: the Reasoning and Rehabilitation Program. In *Handbook of offender assessment and treatment*, ed C Hollin, 179–193. Chichester: Wiley.
- Ross RR, Fabiano E and Ross RD (1988). *Reasoning and Rehabilitation: a handbook for teaching cognitive skills*. Ottawa: Cognitive Centre.
- Ryan RM (1995). Psychological needs and the facilitation of integrative process. *Journal of Personality*, 63(3), 397–427.
- Ryan TA (1991). Literacy training and reintegration of offenders. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 3(1), 17–23.
- Schmidt H (2001). *3900 alumni geven hun mening: effecten van probleemgestuurd onderwijs na het afstuderen [3900 alumni give their opinion: effects of problem-based education after graduation]*. MCMLXXVI-MMI. Jubileum book on the 25th anniversary of the university. Maastricht: Universiteit Maastricht.
- SEU (2002). *Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners: report by the Social Exclusion Unit*. London: Social Exclusion Unit.

- Sherman L, Gottfredson D, MacKenzie D, Eck J, Reuter P and Bushway S (1998). *Preventing crime: what works, what doesn't, what's promising. Report to US Congress prepared by the National Institute of Justice*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice.
- Stewart D (2005). *An evaluation of basic skills training for prisoners*. Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate, Research Findings No 260. London: Home Office.
- Sticht T (2003). From oracy to literacy. *Literacy Today*, issue no 36. At [www.literacytrust.org.uk/Pubs/sticht.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Pubs/sticht.html), accessed 5 January 2006.
- Sticht TG, Hofstetter CR and Hofstetter CH (1999). Knowledge, literacy and power. *Communication Research*, 26(1), 58–80.
- Taylor R (2000). *A seven-year reconviction study of HMP Grendon therapeutic community*. Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate, Research Findings No 115. London: Home Office.
- Townsend T (1991). Foreword. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 3(1), 2. Ottawa, OT: Correctional Service of Canada.
- Vorhaus J (2003). *Education, training, assessment and learner support in HM Prisons and Young Offender Institutions, a preliminary study*. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.
- Vygotsky LS (1978). *Mind and society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Webster A, Caddick B, Reed M and Ford K (1999). Functional versus critical literacy in the rehabilitation of offenders: a survey of probation services in England and Wales. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 18(1), 49–60.
- Wexler HK, De Leon G, Thomas G, Kressel D and Peters J (1999). The Amity prison TC evaluation: reincarceration outcomes. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 26(2), 147–167.
- Whyte J (1993). Patterns of development in good and poor readers age 6–11. In *Facets of dyslexia and its remediation*, eds SF Wright and R Groner. North Holland: Amsterdam.
- Wilkinson J (2005). Evaluating evidence for the effectiveness of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme. *The Howard Journal*, 44(1), 70–85.
- Wilson DH, Gallagher CA and MacKenzie DL (2000). A meta-analysis of corrections-based education, vocation and work-based programs for adult offenders. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 37(4), 347–368.







**Part B**

**Enhancement of cognitive skills training programmes in  
Scottish prisons – identifying future research**

**Rebecca Soden**

**Kay Livingston**

The Quality in Education Centre (QIE)

University of Strathclyde





**Contents**

105	<b>Section 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
	1.1	Background to the project
	1.2	Research design
	1.3	Research aim and planned activities
109	<b>Section 2</b>	<b>Literature search on thinking skills programmes in prisons</b>
	2.1	Purposes of thinking skills programmes in prisons
	2.2	Education programmes in the Scottish Prison Service (SPS)
	2.3	The specific literature that informed the research proposal
	2.4	Future research on R&R-type programmes
123	<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>Proposal submitted to the Scottish Prison Service</b>
137		Bibliography



**Section 1****Introduction**

This is a final report on research conducted during 2003 and 2004 by the Quality in Education Centre (QIE) at the University of Strathclyde. The original research intention was to describe aspects of prisoners' interaction while they were participating in a programme called Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) (Ross, Fabiano and Ewles 1988) in a Scottish prison. Appendix 1 includes the aims of the original proposal, specific research questions and sample research instruments. It was not possible to implement the research proposal laid out in Appendix 1, since the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) did not grant access to prisoners. Therefore the intended description of prisoner interaction could not be reported. Instead, the researchers have derived from relevant literature further areas of research that have potential for enhancing thinking skills programmes in HM Prisons. This introduction outlines the original and amended research intentions, and provides a brief background to the project.

---

**1.1****Background to the project**

Early in 2003, the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and the University of Sunderland were funded by the Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC) to conduct an extensive project in HM Prisons in England and Wales to evaluate educational interventions that claim to help prisoners to organise and communicate their thoughts (see Part A of this report). A grant was also made to the Quality in Education Centre (QIE) at the University of Strathclyde to conduct small-scale research in one Scottish prison that would complement the work of the Newcastle/Sunderland team.

In May 2003, a member of the QIE research team participated in a research design meeting with the Newcastle/Sunderland team, and it was agreed that a Scottish case study would provide a useful extension of the main research. The discussion at this meeting included consideration of how to achieve a consistency of approach. One important principle adopted by both teams was that the researchers would do all they could to stress that they were not assessing either the tutors or the prisoners. A provisional arrangement was made that a member of each of the two teams would work together in gathering data in a Scottish prison. This arrangement would not only help to align the larger and smaller research projects, but would also enhance rigour by allowing one researcher to gain a broad impression of prisoner interaction, while the other categorised aspects of the interactions in a way that would allow both quantitative and qualitative analysis of prisoners' talk as they engaged in the R&R programme exercises.

After liaising with the SPS, the research questions and data-gathering instruments reproduced in Appendix 1 were submitted to the SPS; and also to the University of Strathclyde for ethics approval. The ethics approval was granted. The researchers also offered to discuss findings with key personnel in the SPS prior to submitting the final report to the LSRC. However, the SPS committee did not grant access to conduct the research project. They did not seek further information about the proposal and there was no invitation to the research team to be present at the SPS committee meeting(s). When the research team sought feedback, the main reason given was that an evaluation programme was planned by the SPS.

It is possible that a lengthy preamble to the research proposal that was submitted to the SPS committee would have helped to clarify the proposal. However, since there is a tension between providing a full rationale for research and the constraints on the time of committee members who will judge the proposal, it was considered that a brief rationale, together with the sample research instruments, would indicate what information was being sought and how it addressed gaps in the literature. The researchers would have welcomed an opportunity to discuss their written proposal with the appropriate SPS committee. A rigorous interview might have enabled the research team to convince the SPS committee that the proposal complemented rather than duplicated their own planned evaluations.

---

## **1.2**

### **Research design**

The aim of the intended research within Scottish prisons emerged from the QIE research team's LSRC-funded evaluation of post-16 pedagogy and thinking skills initiatives (Livingston, Soden, and Kirkwood 2004) and from research (eg Friendship *et al.* 2002; Wilson 2003) on the impact of cognitive skills-type programmes in HM Prisons. What emerged from the LSRC-funded research project is that certain types of peer talk promote abilities connected with employability and citizenship. In particular, types of talk that include asking each other questions, offering explanations, encouraging the generation of fresh ideas and challenging each other's assumptions are known to correlate with improvements in work- and education-related competences (Ogden 2000; Christie *et al.* 2004). Talk relating to monitoring progress with tasks and encouraging other group members is connected with enhanced social skills and self-regulation of one's actions. Preliminary desk research suggested that while qualitative research had been done on thinking skills programmes in Scottish prisons (Wilson 2003), it had not included analyses of prisoner dialogue during the programme activities.



It was decided to identify a well-tried thinking skills programme that was available in most prisons. This decision was made in order to avoid problems that are unconnected with the research questions, such as a course team's lack of experience in working with a training programme or poor programme design. Therefore the programme selected should be one that met educational criteria determined by the SPS and which had been monitored for some time. It should also be a programme that was in operation across the SPS. Thus, the proposed pilot research could be repeated in other prisons to build up a body of generalisable findings that might serve as a basis for future research.

Preliminary research suggested that the Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) programme in Scottish Prisons met these requirements. The R&R programme was first delivered in Scotland in 1995, is now available in every HM Prison in Scotland with the exception of the two open prisons and has been the focus of both quantitative and qualitative evaluation (Wilson 2003). This programme, which is described below, is intended to help offenders to break the cycle of persistent reoffending through developing thinking skills connected with controlling impulsivity, reasoning more productively and achieving greater empathy with others.

HM Prison Greenock was identified as an appropriate establishment for the intended study because it has delivered the R&R programme to a varied client group since the programme was introduced into the SPS. It is a local prison that serves the courts in the West of Scotland and provides facilities to meet the requirements of a range of offenders. Research indicated that progress had been made in this prison in the delivery of programmes aimed at reducing reoffending, and that collaboration with its staff would contribute much to the proposed case study and generate hypotheses that would merit larger-scale research. It is also one of the nearest Scottish prisons to the University of Strathclyde, which would allow more of the available time to be spent on gathering observational data. It was decided that a description of Greenock prisoners' talk during their participation in the R&R programme could indicate ways in which the quality of talk could be enhanced.

---

### 1.3

#### Research aim and planned activities

The overall aim of the proposed research was ‘to explore how learner interaction in a Reasoning and Rehabilitation programme in HM Prison Greenock might be developed in ways that help to realise the programme aims as fully as possible’.

The specific research questions can be found in Appendix 1.

The plan for analysing the data was influenced by methods of analysis described in Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood’s (2004) LSRC-funded research and by ESRC-funded research by one team member (Anderson *et al.* 2001). In order to articulate the Scottish findings with those of the Newcastle/Sunderland research team, it was intended that the project would also include a questionnaire to collate publicly available background information about educational provision in HMP Greenock. This proposed questionnaire, similar to the one being used by the Newcastle/Sunderland team, together with all other proposed instrumentation, is included in Appendix 1.

The planned activities were as follows:

- conduct a literature search on thinking skills programmes in prisons in Scotland.
- attend a meeting with the Newcastle/Sunderland research team
- prepare the research proposal, including all research instruments, for consideration by the SPS
- complete the documents required for ethics approval from the University of Strathclyde
- liaise with the Newcastle/Sunderland research team and with the SPS
- gather and analyse the data described in the research proposal
- prepare the project report.

All the above activities were completed with the exception of the gathering and analysis of the data described in the research proposal, because the SPS did not grant the access to prisoners that would have been required to gather the data described in Appendix 1.

Therefore this project report describes the outcomes of the other six activities and drawing on these activities, suggests future research that could inform development of the R&R programme.

**Section 2****Literature search on thinking skills programmes in prisons****2.1****Purposes of thinking skills programmes in prisons**

Most thinking skills courses rest on research that posits strong connections between how people think about the world and how they act on that thinking (Bereiter 2002). It is assumed that if people can learn to think more productively, they will pursue personal and work goals more effectively. Many thinking skills courses in prisons include activities designed to help prisoners to replace socially inappropriate goals and strategies with more appropriate ones: thus, course participants engage in simulations that encourage them to think about and practise enhanced self-control, interpersonal problem solving and prosocial behaviour.

Wilson (2003) points out that the Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) programme in Scottish prisons rests on the assumption that prisoners have cognitive deficits which can be addressed through this programme. Thus, the rationale for such programmes is derived from psychological rather than sociological explanations of criminal activity. In common with thinking skills programmes in schools and colleges, the programmes in prisons incorporate the assumption that what is learned during the programme will be transferred to life activities outside the prison. As Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood (2004) pointed out in their literature review, this is one of the most contested assumptions underlying thinking skills programmes.

When the team from the universities of Newcastle upon Tyne and Sunderland was beginning its research in 2003, reports arising from research sponsored by the Home Office (Cann *et al.* 2003; Falshaw *et al.* 2003) raised serious concerns about thinking skills programmes in prisons in England and Wales. This research appeared to show that such programmes failed to stop prisoners returning to a life of crime. These results were quite unexpected because earlier research studies had shown that the courses were successful in addressing recidivism. Friendship *et al.* (2002) evaluated cognitive skills programmes used within HM Prison Service, using re-conviction as the outcome measure and their results indicated that treatment produced a robust reduction in the probability of re-conviction when other variables were controlled.

The researchers who did not identify a robust reduction in recidivism (Cann *et al.* 2003; Falshaw *et al.* 2003) insisted that their findings should not be taken as evidence that these programmes are ineffective: influences on criminal activity are numerous and complex, and such variations in findings were mirrored in international research. Additionally, conditions under which the programmes were delivered had changed between earlier and later studies and this may have affected outcomes. In particular, in the earlier studies, both staff and prisoners had been volunteers; but since the programmes had been accredited by an expert panel, there had been a rapid expansion in the number of prisoners participating in the course throughout the SPS, leading to more staff being trained. Although still nominally voluntary for prisoners, participation is included in offenders' sentence plans and can influence release. It is well documented in cognitive dissonance literature that when participants perceive that their engagement in any activity is not entirely voluntary, their thinking is less likely to change. If thinking is assumed to drive behaviour, perceptions that one's participation is not entirely voluntary have implications for behavioural change.

There was also speculation that due to the rapid expansion of the programme, treatment quality might be compromised (Falshaw *et al.* 2003). However, the rigorous monitoring of SPS education programmes means that this is unlikely to be the case in the Scottish context. McGuire (1995) concluded from a review of the meta-analytical literature that such programmes could be effective when certain features of programme design and implementation were present. These included matching prisoners to programmes according to their risk of reoffending and ensuring that staff had appropriate training and support.

Even if learning to think more productively does not lead to a marked reduction in recidivism, the ability to think well is likely to influence employment prospects and take-up of further education (Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood 2004). Research suggests that it is worth helping prisoners to restructure their thinking about goals and strategies, especially if outcome measures are broadened to include skills connected with citizenship and employment. However, many aspects of the processes involved in achieving such outcomes are not yet well understood.

---

## **2.2**

### **Education programmes in the Scottish Prison Service (SPS)**

A recent Audit Scotland report (2005) on 'correctional opportunities for prisoners' in the SPS identifies six 'offending behaviour programmes', accredited by an expert panel, that are current in Scottish prisons. These are:

- Cognitive Skills (or R&R)
- Problem-solving Skills
- Anger Management
- Drugs Relapse Prevention
- STOP (Straight Thinking on Probation) (Core) 2000 (a sex offenders' rehabilitation programme)
- Lifeline (a drug prevention programme).

In 2003/04, a total of 843 prisoners completed these programmes: 397 (47%) completed the Cognitive Skills/R&R programme; 188 (22%) completed Anger Management programmes; 127 (15%) completed Lifeline, with the remaining three programmes between them having 130 prisoners (15%) completing them. This confirms the importance of the R&R programme within the service and its relevance for this study.

The Audit Scotland report highlights three important issues with respect to these programmes in Scottish prisons. First, there are variations in the level of activity at individual establishments in terms of both the numbers of prisoners involved and the types of opportunity available; second, delivery of such programmes is hindered by overcrowding and budget savings; and third, although some internal evaluation of the programmes has been undertaken, the SPS has not yet evaluated the effectiveness of the programmes on reducing reoffending after release.

### **The Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) programme in HM Prisons in Scotland**

The R&R programme in HM Prisons in Scotland is primarily, though not exclusively, informed by cognitive-behavioural therapy. In programmes based on this perspective, participants identify aspects of their thinking that incline them towards behaviour likely to bring consequences that they neither anticipate nor want; they then practise alternative ways of thinking and try to act in accordance with their developing thinking. An important assumption is that more rational thinking will lead to behaviour that is likely to be consistent with setting and achieving prosocial goals.

Since the 1980s, criminal justice systems throughout the world have used cognitive-behavioural group work as a rehabilitative tool to address a wide range of offending behaviour (Wilson 2003). McGuire (1995) concluded that available evidence tends to support the view that positive effects arise from participation in programmes that encourage the practice of more prosocial thinking and behaviour. The cognitive-behavioural perspective provides a coherent and logical account of how people can replace thinking and behaviour that brings unwanted consequences with reasoning and action that better serves their goals. In common with most theoretical perspectives, it rests on assumptions that might be considered problematic, such as the posited connection between thinking and behaviour. Research literature on changing beliefs (eg Pintrich 2004) documents people's resistance to changing their beliefs about the social world and how they want to operate in it.

The R&R programme that has been used in HM Prisons in Scotland since 1995 draws heavily on a programme developed by Ross, Fabiano and Ewles (1988) and tested by the Probation Service in Ontario, Canada in 1988. During 2001/02, a total of 488 prisoners completed the programme in Scottish prisons, though, as noted above, during 2003/04, a lower total of 397 prisoners completed the programme. One reason for the adoption of this particular programme was the reporting of promising results from Canada, where the initial evaluation of the programme showed a reoffending rate of 18% for clients on the programme, compared with almost 70% for clients who had not undertaken this course. These findings are based on clients described as being on a period of straightforward probation.

The R&R programme draws not only on ideas from cognitive-behavioural therapy, but also on values education literature, on de Bono's notion (1990) of lateral thinking and on the more general literature on thinking skills (see Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood (2004)). The programme consists of 43 sessions, with groups of between four and eight prisoners. Competences related to the areas listed below are practised during the R&R workshops. For example, activities are designed to encourage prisoners to re-assess their values, to imagine alternative solutions to commonly experienced problems, to negotiate solutions, to exercise judgement and control anger. Group sessions are supplemented by exercises on which prisoners work between sessions, although it is not clear from the documents available as to what form this practice takes, nor how it is structured and managed. The content of the programme is outlined below:

- solving problems in a prosocial manner (9 sessions)
- social skills:  
includes encouraging prisoners to consider the thoughts and feelings of others (8 sessions)
- creative thinking:  
based on Edward de Bono's texts that encourage lateral thinking (looking for alternative ways of doing or understanding a situation) (10 sessions)
- values enhancement:  
by questioning their own values and considering the possibly conflicting views of others (10 sessions)
- negotiation skills:  
reaching compromises without being seen to back down (1 session)
- managing emotion:  
control of anger and recognising triggers of anger and other emotions (1 session)
- critical reasoning:  
learning to think critically (4 sessions).

The review of recent research by Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood (2004) highlighted the following key principles operating in effective thinking skills programmes:

- encourage offenders to change their understanding
- assist offenders to transfer their learning
- promote learning with others
- challenge the learner
- structure the programmes so that they employ measures to ease the participants into tasks and to establish personal meaning for them
- develop skills such as concept formation, enquiry and reasoning skills to better equip their independent thinking
- make the participants think about thinking and the emotional and motivational dimensions of thinking.

It was not, however, possible to establish from the documents that were publicly available (and in the absence of observational data) the extent to which these principles were driving the R&R programmes.

Similarly, it was not possible to establish the extent to which the R&R programmes had taken account of research on methods of assessing thinking skills. According to the review of thinking skills research by Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood (2004), there are certain key characteristics of promising methods for assessing growth in prison learning contexts. These include:

- effective formative feedback, including peer feedback and assessment
- the use of public and shared criteria
- more focused and in-depth assessments
- assessments contributing to instructional aims that include 'authentic' tasks which enable offenders to apply a range of thinking skills
- trainers with a range of expertise relevant to assessing growth in thinking.

These characteristics could be used to inform the development of methods of assessing thinking for offenders.



## Recruitment to the R&R-type programmes

Although prisoners may be advised that attendance is appropriate, there is considerable self-referral. Selection processes include a semi-structured interview with a course facilitator to identify the scope for enhancing the prisoner's skills. Prisoners complete evaluation forms and the facilitator writes a report on each participant which is lodged in his/her personal file. Effective measures are in place in Scottish prisons to ensure that all staff are aware of the aims and content of the programme. The quality of the programme is assured through an accreditation process that involves scrutiny by an expert panel; and by an inspection process that covers staff support and management, recruitment and training, programme delivery and resources. In addition, selected sessions are videotaped for audit. Prisoners' perceptions of the programme (strongly positive) have been reported by a senior researcher in the SPS (Wilson 2003).

---

## 2.3

### The specific literature that informed the research proposal

The choice of the particular research questions in the proposal submitted to the SPS was informed by literature which suggests that different types of peer talk influence thinking and action in different ways (Anderson and Soden 2001; Anderson, Soden and Hunter 2001; Christie *et al.* 2004). Thinking skills programmes often include tasks that are designed to encourage participants to weigh up available evidence for views and practices; to explain, question or comment; or to generate and discuss different solutions to problems. It is important to know the extent to which such verbal behaviours are occurring in participants' discussions. Plainly, if participants engage only infrequently in questioning assumptions or asking for evidence for peers' views, their participation in the programme is less likely to improve their ability to spot flaws in the claims that others make or to realise that their views are based on shaky evidence.

Often, participants in thinking skills programmes are given a short scenario with one or two general questions, or with more specific instructions such as a request to talk about the possible consequences of an action or to identify flaws in the evidence offered by peers for actions which they advocate. For example, the following scenario and instructions have been used in the R&R programme in the SPS (Wilson 2003):

**Preamble** *Some messages are loaded and try to create a false view of things. I want you to read the following statements and tell me a few things about them:*

**Scenario** *I'm sure that Bill is not a grass. So maybe he does hang around the office a lot and talks to the supervisor. So he hangs out a lot with the druggies but doesn't seem to use the stuff himself. In fact he's always poking his nose into things. So he got his C. cat pretty damned quick, but none of these things means that he's a grass.*

**Instructions for discussion** *How is the person trying to get over his message? Is he being unfair? In what way?*



These instructions are more open-ended than those used in some other thinking skills interventions (eg Anderson and Soden 2001; Anderson, Soden and Hunter 2001; Soden and Maclellan 2005) that aim to provide more systematic coaching on the reasoning skills to be developed. A question that is unresolved in relation to a prison population is the extent to which the specificity of instructions influences development of the targeted reasoning skills. A necessary first step towards resolving this question is to describe types of talk that arise from the exercise instructions that are currently being used, such as those in the above scenario.

Wilson (2003) also used the above scenario in research that aimed to elicit prisoners' perceptions of the R&R programme in the SPS. There was no intention to use the data in this study to describe the types of talk that are described in the psychological literature as constituting effective reasoning. Wilson's research lies within a well-respected qualitative tradition that aims to understand the meaning of an experience for those who engage in it (eg Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1994). His research aimed to understand the prisoners' perceptions of what they had gained through participation in the R&R programme. The following is an extract from Wilson's data (2003: 21):

*Somebody can come up to you and say... I know for a fact I seen her talking about you last night and... she says this about you. And the type of person I was when I came into this prison, my answer would have been... 'What the fucking hell are you saying about me, and I dinnae like that.' This would end up with me in a lot of trouble, on report...*

When the interviewer asks the prisoner how she would deal with a similar situation after she completed the R&R programme, she says:

*I am interested in people's opinion, if it matters. But if their opinion doesn't matter to me, then I just forget about it... I'm not here for anyone else to like me... if somebody else doesn't think I'm a nice person, then that's their problem.*

As Wilson points out (2003: 8), his study purports to be on 'Cognitive Skills "in my own words"', whereas the research proposal submitted to SPS involved a categorisation and quantification of the prisoners' talk. Wilson's research interviews focus on some aspects of the R&R programme that are aimed at thinking processes. The prisoners were asked how they would think about a situation before and after they had participated in the R&R programme; whereas the proposal submitted to the SPS by the Strathclyde research team involved recording prisoners' dialogue while they engaged in exercises during the R&R programme. The intention was to shed light on what additional types of talk might be introduced to advance thinking. For example, if our research team had been analysing the last segment of Wilson's data presented above, the segment might have been categorised as one that involves identifying and not responding to what is irrelevant to the prisoner's goal of completing her sentence. The proposed research involved looking for the frequency of such strategies in the observational data. The resulting analysis would have revealed thinking strategies that were either not used at all or infrequently. Such a finding might lead to a recommendation that additional strategies be introduced into programmes (eg learning to ask questions to establish the credibility of information).

No studies emerged from our literature search that categorised prisoners' talk during thinking skills exercises. Yet it is important to gather such data if task instructions are to be effective in promoting the intended thinking skills, and if advances are to be made in understanding how dialogue functions to extend people's understanding of issues. Useful information about such matters has been derived from studies where researchers have measured aspects of peer dialogue and the frequency of different types of dialogue. Schwartz *et al.* (2003) gathered evidence which indicated that individuals appropriated reasons from peers within their discussions and abandoned reasons as a result of their discussions; additionally, there was evidence within the dialogues that the arguments and reasons given by peers and by the texts provided were also prompting the generation of novel (previously unexpressed) items of knowledge by participants during the group discussion phase. Analysis of such matters can provide practitioners with information that enables them to assess whether students need help in engaging in dialogue that is likely to take their thinking forward.

The value of finding out how adults reason in discussion of tasks that bear closer resemblance to some of those used in the R&R programme is illustrated in research by Resnick *et al.* (1993) who examined shared reasoning in conversation. Groups of three undergraduates (constructed so that both possible positions on the issue at stake were represented) discussed the issue of nuclear power. The analysis by Resnick *et al.* of fragments of the resulting dialogue suggested that people have developed a repertoire of reasoning behaviours that could be used for the development of critical reasoning. The data showed that sophisticated, coherent argument structures emerged within the conversations, and that these structures emerged interactively: participants listened carefully to each other and constructed their views in relation to what interlocutors said, building complex 'for and against' structures. The researchers believed that this technique might be useful for gathering data in the prison sector to establish prisoner strengths that could be extended through peer interaction. Interestingly, the research of Resnick *et al.* questions the idea of deficits in everyday thinking.

Evidence about the efficacy of peer interaction could be investigated more thoroughly through a research design that enables correlations to be calculated between dialogue variables – such as prisoners' references to evidence or values – and outcomes such as an increase in the propensity to use non-aggressive rational, verbal means of resolving disputes with other prisoners. Anderson *et al.* (2001) calculated relationships between FE students' propensity to offer evidence for their views during discussion tasks within small groups and the appearance of evidence in the students' subsequent coursework. Anderson *et al.* concluded that students can gain more from discussion tasks within small groups if they are asked to think about evidence for their views. Such correlations might suggest the strength of the effects of different types of peer interaction on prisoners' reasoning performance.

Anderson and Soden (2001) found only one study that explicitly tested for such a transfer of the effects of peer interaction beyond the subject matter within which the talk took place – and this study failed to show beneficial effects of the peer interaction-based training programme. Kuhn (1999) points out that the gains reported in interventions most often are not generalised beyond the immediate instructional context. Yet in the documents relating to the SPS R&R and similar programmes, it is implied that what is learned during the programme in prison is intended to transfer to life outside. Such generalisation is very much a contested issue (see eg Detterman and Sternberg 1993; Perkins and Grotzer 1997; Salomon and Perkins 1998) and one that could form an agenda for further research within the SPS.

---

## **2.4**

### **Future research on R&R-type programmes**

#### **Development of critical reasoning in the R&R-type programmes**

The case has been well made that learning to think critically about whatever one is doing is an important but not well-realised purpose of post-school education (Kuhn 1991; Bennett, Dunne and Carre 2000). Four of the 43 sessions in the R&R programme are specifically concerned with critical reasoning. In the critical reasoning programmes that Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood (2004) reviewed, those that had significant impact on learners' thinking included a much larger number of sessions. Future development of programmes to develop prisoners' thinking might well include an expansion of what is encompassed by the term critical reasoning/thinking (see Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood 2004).

Most studies of adult competence in critical thinking (eg Kuhn 1991) conclude that there is very considerable scope for development of adults' thinking. Indeed, many researchers argue that their findings give serious cause for concern about levels of critical thinking in the adult population, and massive investment is required in development work in this area (Kuhn 1991, 1999; King and Kitchener 1994; King 2000).

In the relevant literature (eg Kuhn 1991, 1999), critical thinking ability is described in terms of being able to differentiate between opinion and evidence, to weigh up evidence and to give appropriate consideration to both evidence and factors such as avoiding discord in a community or work context. Some of these abilities are targeted in the R&R-type programmes, but the research literature suggests that too little time is spent on developing these abilities to make much difference. Yet it is easy to see how these competences might help prisoners, their families and those they meet outside prison to achieve amicable and productive discussion of why they prefer to do things one way rather than another.

Since such competences are also connected with success in the formal education system, parents who achieve these competences in prison or elsewhere might be able to model them for their children. However, development of these competences in the prison population would require programmes in which critical thinking dominated the entire programme, rather than being restricted to a few sessions as in the present programmes. Such an initiative would require substantial additional training of the prison staff who would deliver such a programme. A starting point for development of this area would be a study that mapped the current understandings of critical thinking among interested prison staff and which explored how these understandings could be developed and combined with an approach to developing prisoners' critical reasoning.

Further research using a case study design might explore the following research problems.

- Are there differences between notions of critical thinking in the literature and those held by staff?
- How relevant are conceptions in the literature on critical thinking in prison education?
- How helpful to a staff team is theory-guided analysis of thinking?
- How can the extent of prisoners' critical thinking be assessed?
- To what extent do prisoners achieve course aims relating to critical thinking?

There might be three stages in such a case study. In the first main stage, the objective would be to develop a method, guided by theory, of quantifying the extent of critical thinking in prisoners' talk. A second stage might be designed to reveal how members of a course team described critical thinking. A third stage would be designed to judge the merit of further research into the proposition that discussion of critical thinking literature has a significant role in staff development programmes, in helping staff to clarify how evidence of thinking is to be demonstrated in prison education coursework.

### **Building on the research of the Newcastle/Sunderland team: motivation**

Clarke, Simmonds and Wydall (2004), in their qualitative study of cognitive skills programmes within prisons, suggest four 'types' of programme participant which may be relevant to the work done in HMP Greenock. The authors offer a discussion about perceptions of prisoners' motivation and argue that this is a key factor to consider when examining the impact of programmes. Three main themes are proposed in accounts of motivation:

- self-development
- instrumental thinking
- hostile attitudes and behaviours.

It is argued that within these themes, there are components that can be divided into institutional and individual factors. Institutional factors include the culture of the prison, the timing of the programme within a prisoner's sentence and the way the purposes of the programme are presented. Individual factors include the personalities, biographies, family circumstances and maturity of the individuals, the effects of participation in the programme on the individual (eg through content, delivery, tutors, etc) and individual progress through the 'cycle of change' model (Prochaska and DiClemente 1982).

### **The question of transfer of reasoning skills from prison to life in the community**

There is little evidence that what has been learned in one situation transfers to another (Singley and Anderson 1989; Haskell 2001). Since transfer is usually poorest among the students with the lowest levels of achievement (Bereiter 1995; Butler 1998), there is a case for giving far greater research attention to the question of how prisoners will be helped to use what they have learned in programmes such as R&R when they return to the community. Haskell (2001) argues that thinking processes will take different forms, depending on what is being learned. Thus, ex-offenders need to learn ways of selecting and processing information about training, financial support available and employment prospects in order to reach sensible decisions about action; whereas in the prison course, they have necessarily practised their thinking on less complex tasks and their solutions have few consequences.

All the areas in the R&R-type programmes have been the focus of extensive research with non-prison populations. Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood (2004) found some evidence that when approaches similar to those in the R&R programme were used with post-16 learners in formal education contexts, they became better able to deploy the thinking skills within the confines of the programme, but there was little evidence of transfer to other contexts. This conclusion helps to account for findings outlined above – that such programmes do not always contribute significantly to reducing reoffending, since any effect will depend on prisoners transferring the cognitive skills they have learned in a prison context to life outside prison. The implication of the research by Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood (2004) is that prison thinking skills programmes need to be continued in the community after prisoners are released; and that they should focus on helping people to think about tasks they currently perform to achieve personal goals that do not involve criminal activity. Thus, a community-based version of the R&R programme for ex-offenders might be focused on tasks such as finding a suitable training course, securing employment and rebuilding family relationships.

When considering transfer of what has been learned in prison about more prosocial thinking and behaviour, the perspective known as ‘situated learning’ (see eg Cole and Engestrom 1993; St Julien 1997) is also relevant. It helps to illuminate why it is so problematic to transfer what is learned in prison to non-prison life. This perspective assumes that much of what is learned is specific to the situation in which it was learned. Proponents would assert that learning is heavily tied to the particular context in which it occurs. Thus we should be unsurprised if learning in prison to think about the consequences of participating in an armed robbery should fail to transfer to thinking about this situation outside prison. Situated theorists such as Cole and Engestrom would argue that learning to deal with such a situation is better understood as a process of enculturation into the life of non-criminal groups, rather than a process of transferring what was learned in the quite different situation of the prison.

Future research needs to take account of the different models of transfer of learning in the literature (Haskell 2001). While there are weaknesses in descriptions and models, setting them out might help practitioners to be clearer about how interventions should be designed. There is a need to synthesise (a) the findings on the use of thinking skills programmes with prison populations; and (b) the conclusions from research on transfer of learning, which indicate that gains tend to be limited to the tasks on which people practise their thinking.

### **Summary of suggested future research**

Further research in the following areas is likely to produce recommendations for improving thinking skills courses in Scottish prisons:

- analyses of prisoners' reasoning about situations to determine gaps in reasoning competence; such research would inform programme development and illuminate changes in prisoners' thinking that might be expected to feed through to reductions in reoffending rates
- expanding provision for learning to think critically by including a wider range of critical reasoning skills, particularly those that involve distinguishing between opinion and evidence and weighing up evidence
- infusing reasoning skills into all prisoner activities so that the prison environment is designed as a thinking environment
- designing staff development workshops that encourage prison officers to expand their own understanding of thinking and its connection with action
- a Scottish study related to the Newcastle/Sunderland research; for example, interactions between institutional and individual factors in influencing individuals' progress through the 'cycle of change'
- helping prisoners to transfer the thinking skills that they learned in prison courses to life in their communities.





**Appendix 1****Proposal submitted to the Scottish Prison Service****Project title: an investigation into directions for development of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) programme in HMP Greenock****Introduction**

In the context of Home Office and other research (eg Friendship *et al.* 2003) on the impact of cognitive skills-type programmes in HM Prisons on reoffending, employment and take-up of further education, our research project aims to explore how learner interaction in the Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R) programme in HMP Greenock might be developed in ways that help to realise the R&R aims as fully as possible. From documentary research on the provision of cognitive skills training programmes in HM Prisons in Scotland, we noted that HMP Greenock was one that has played a pioneering role in delivering this type of programme. Therefore we believe that collaboration with staff there will contribute much to our proposed small pilot study which is intended to generate hypotheses that may merit larger-scale research.

The aim of the proposed research emerged from our recent theoretically informed evaluation of post-16 pedagogy and thinking skills initiatives in Australia, Israel, the US and Western Europe (Livingston, Soden and Kirkwood 2004). That research was funded by the Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC), as is this proposed project at HMP Greenock. What emerged from our recently completed LSRC research is that learner interaction is a key variable in the more successful cognitive skills interventions, but that much more research is required on patterns of interaction that are likely to promote R&R-type aims. The aims of the proposed research are to explore forms of learner interaction that might contribute to realising the R&R programme aims as fully as possible.

Our data gathering and analysis is influenced by our recent research and by previous research by one of us in Scottish FE colleges (Anderson *et al.* 2001).

Currently, the universities of Newcastle upon Tyne and Sunderland are conducting a related but much more extensive LSRC-funded project in HM Prisons in England and Wales that has the aim of evaluating educational interventions that claim to help prisoners to organise and communicate their thoughts. In order to articulate our Scottish findings with those of the Newcastle/Sunderland research team, our project will include a questionnaire to collate background information about education provision in HMP Greenock. This proposed questionnaire, similar to the one being used by the Newcastle/Sunderland team, together with all other proposed instrumentation, is included below.

The researchers will provide feedback on the findings to the SPS prior to submitting the final report to the LSRC early in 2004. The final report is intended to inform policy-makers and practitioners.

## **Aims of the project**

The aims of the proposed research are to investigate directions for the development of the R&R programme in HMP Greenock, and to explore forms of learner interaction that might contribute to realising the R&R learning outcomes as fully as possible.

## **Specific research questions**

What cognitive skills are to be developed through the R&R programme in HMP Greenock?

How are the cognitive skills outcomes for the R&R programmes assessed?

What changes might be beneficial in cognitive skill outcomes, and in assessment of these outcomes?

What forms does learner interaction take in the R&R workshops?

What forms of learner interaction are reported as more successful ones in relation to completion of participants' workshop tasks?

What (if anything) makes it difficult for inmates to engage in task-oriented learner interaction?

What developments might be beneficial in forms of learner interaction in the R&R workshops?

What other instructional activities would staff members and inmates want to include in the R&R workshops?

How could more opportunities be made available for inmates to practise the cognitive skills acquired outside the R&R programme?

How might staff member or learner readiness to engage with the R&R activities be enhanced?

## **Method**

### **Design**

The proposed research takes the form of an evaluative case study, a method that, according to Bassey (1999), is appropriate when the purpose is to illuminate the extent to which aspects of a programme's stated objectives might be more fully realised.

### **Participants**

The researchers would like to work, in the ways described in the section on 'Procedure' below, with two prison staff members, each of whom is timetabled to deliver an R&R workshop during the week that the research takes place, and with four inmates who participated in each of the two workshops. It is anticipated that all participants will be nominated by appropriate prison staff.

## Data to be collected and instrumentation

The researchers are seeking access to Prison Service documents that staff members delivering the R&R programme use to determine the outcomes, pedagogy and assessment for R&R workshops in HMP Greenock.

The instruments to be used to collect data are appended. They are:

- *Questionnaire*, designed by the Newcastle/Sunderland research team. This instrument asks for information about education provision in HMP Greenock. The information is required to enable the researchers to articulate it with the data for the LSRC-funded parallel project in England and Wales.
- Observation schedule for R&R workshops.
- Staff interview schedule.
- Questions for focus groups with inmates.

## Procedure

*(All the instruments referred to below are described in the section above entitled 'Data to be collected and instrumentation'.)*

To become familiar with delivery guidelines for the R&R programme, the researchers propose to begin by examining any Prison Service documents available that describe outcomes, pedagogy and assessment relating to the R&R programme in HMP Greenock. The researchers then propose to:

- Ask an appropriate staff member at HMP Greenock to provide background information on education provision in the prison by completing the questionnaire at the end of this appendix before being interviewed.
- Observe one R&R workshop in HMP Greenock, conducted by each of the two staff members, and record observation of inmate interactions by using the categories in the *Observation schedule for R&R workshops*. The categories of interaction are based on a study of cognitive skills practice in Scottish FE colleges (Anderson *et al.* 2001). The frequency of the categories of interaction listed below (under 'Instrumentation to be used for the proposed research') will be noted.
- Ask the two participating prison staff members to provide brief information about themselves by completing Section 1 of the *Staff interview schedule* prior to the proposed interview. This information is required to articulate it with data being gathered in England and Wales.

- The researchers will conduct an individual interview with the two staff members who delivered the above workshops, using the *Staff interview schedule*. The researcher will note responses, which will be read back to the interviewee, to allow him/her to amend any responses. No audio or video recording will be made.

The researchers will conduct two focus groups, with four inmates from each of the two workshop groups, the inmates being chosen by staff members. Both researchers will be present. One researcher will note responses, which will be read back to the inmates to allow them to amend any responses. No audio or video recording will be made.

### **Data analysis**

*As noted at the end of the 'Introduction' section of this proposal, the researchers will provide feedback to the SPS regarding the findings prior to submitting the final report to the LSRC.*

- The background information on education provision in HMP Greenock that is collected via the *Questionnaire* (appended) will be used in the introductory part of the case study to describe the educational context in which the cognitive skills training takes place. This information will enable the LSRC funders to identify differences in Scottish provision from that in England and Wales, as reported in the parallel project conducted by the Newcastle/Sunderland team.
- Following the method used in the Anderson *et al.* (2001) study, the absolute frequency of each category of interaction in the *Observation schedule for R&R workshops* will be reported. In view of the limited data and the fact that Anderson *et al.* (2001) established that proportional and absolute frequencies were highly inter-correlated, the proportion of each of the categories to total utterances will not be reported.
- *Staff interview schedule*: the Section 1 information will be used in the introductory part of the case study, to describe broadly the two staff members' previous work experience, post-school education and training, and interest in delivering the R&R programme. No reference will be made to any information that could lead to identification of the two staff members.
- A summary of the two staff members' suggestions for improvements and their views will be made by the two researchers.
- *Questions for focus groups with inmates*: a summary of the inmates' views will be made by the two researchers.

### **The report on the research**

The findings will be collated into a case study.

## **Instrumentation to be used in the proposed research**

### **Observation schedule for R&R workshops**

Drawing on categories of student/tutor and student/student interaction observed during cognitive skills practice in Scottish FE colleges (Anderson *et al.* 2001), the frequency of the categories of interaction listed below will be noted.

#### **Category of interaction**

Inmate offers suggestions about how the skills might be used:

- in other areas of prison life
- outside prison.

Inmate offers relevant suggestions about progressing tasks/issues within the workshop.

Inmate responds to request to expand his/her contribution.

Inmate asserts a view (ie without reasons).

Inmate offers reasons for a view (such as references to experiences they have had or heard about, when some actions have worked/not worked out well, or information received from others).

Inmate disagrees with or challenges:

- another inmate's views
- without reasons
- with reasons (as defined above)
- the tutor's views
- without reasons
- with reasons (as defined above).

Inmate makes references to instruction or task sheets.

Inmate makes positive remarks about the functioning of the group or the exercise as a whole.

Inmate makes negative remarks about the functioning of the group or the exercise as a whole.

Minimal comments (yes/no response).

Asides (all remarks that are not task-relevant).

---

**Staff interview schedule**

**There are two sections in this form. Please complete Section 1 before the interview.**

**Section 2 contains questions to be explored during the interview. It would be helpful if you could think about your views prior to the interview.**

**Section 1**

Institution number

---

Date of interview

---

Course code

---

Name

---

**Background information about you**

Please write a few words about any of the following qualifications you have achieved and describe the general subject area (eg computing/business administration/ construction/catering)

SQA National Certificate Modules  
(please enter number of modules and subject areas)

---

---

SQA Higher National Certificate or Diploma  
(please enter number of modules and subject areas)

---

---

City & Guilds of London Certificate or Diploma  
(please enter number of modules and subject areas)

---

---

Other modules towards diplomas or degrees  
(please enter length of course, full-time or part-time and subject areas; eg 3-year part-time Open University – 3 credits in Social Science degree)

---

---

Brief outline of any work-related courses attended during the last 5 years

---

---

---

---

---

Type of employment in the previous 10 years (other than present job)

---

---

---

---

---

Please tick one or more of the reasons below that describe your motivation for becoming involved in the Cognitive Skills Training Programme:

- ☐ Useful experience for career development
- ☐ It seemed interesting to deliver
- ☐ It seemed like something that would help inmates when they get out
- ☐ Other reasons (please describe briefly)

---

---

---

---

---

## **Section 2 – questions to be explored during the interview**

Thinking about *your experience of delivering the R&R programmes*:

- a** What cognitive skills do you consider to be the more useful ones for life outside prison? Why?
- b** What activities/techniques work well/less well in most sessions? How do you know, and why do you think they work well/less well?
- c** How important is it for inmates to challenge each other's views and the tutor's views? How effectively do they do this? What needs to happen if they are to do it more effectively?
- d** Is there anything else that needs to happen if inmates need to learn in order to engage more effectively in learner interaction in the workshops?
- e** What other activities/techniques would you want to include in the R&R workshops?
- f** What other methods of assessing learning outcomes would you want to include in the R&R workshops?
- g** What opportunities are there for inmates to practise the cognitive skills acquired outside the R&R programme?
- h** How might the readiness of inmates, or of staff members, to engage with the R&R activities be enhanced?
- i** What beliefs do the inmates bring to the R&R workshops that are helpful/unhelpful in promoting the intended learning?
- j** To what extent are there self-paced, self-directed and individualised activities in the R&R programme?

## **Questions for focus groups with inmates**

Thinking about *your experience of the R&R programme*:

- a** What were the most useful sorts of thing you did in the programme?
- b** What needs to happen if you are to learn more from talking to each other about tasks during the programme class meetings?
- c** What other sorts of thing could the staff include in the programme class meetings that might help you to learn the cognitive skills?
- d** What opportunities are there for you to practise what you learn in the programme in other areas of prison life? Can you imagine using what you learned in everyday life when you leave the prison?



---

**Questionnaire produced by the Newcastle/Sunderland research team to collect background information that is likely to be publicly available**

**Please return this questionnaire by 31 March 2003.**

**If you prefer, you can complete an electronic version at [www.ncl.ac.uk/ecls/prisonq](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ecls/prisonq), using your unique institution number (above). The research team at the universities of Newcastle upon Tyne and Sunderland undertake to protect your confidentiality and not to refer to your responses in any way which could identify you.**

Name of institution

---

Type of prison

- ☐ HMP    ☐ YOI

Gender of inmates

- ☐ M        ☐ F        ☐ Both

Category of prison

- ☐ A        ☐ B        ☐ C        ☐ D

To be completed by the person filling in the questionnaire

My job title is

- ☐ Head of inmate activity  
☐ other (please specify)
-

**Please give numbers on 1 March 2003**

Age of prisoners	15–17 juveniles	15–20 young prisoners	21+ adults
Total number of inmates	_____	_____	_____
Number of remand prisoners	_____	_____	_____
Number of sentenced prisoners			
Lifers	_____	_____	_____
DCRs	_____	_____	_____
[Discretionary Conditional Release Scheme] (4 years +)			
ACRs	_____	_____	_____
[Automatic Conditional Release Scheme] (12 months–4 years )			
AURs	_____	_____	_____
[Automatic Unconditional Release Scheme] (less than 12 months)			

Number of prison officers employed

---

Number of prison officers involved  
in the delivery of all courses or training

---

Number of other staff involved in  
the delivery of all courses or training

---

Number of staff *not employed by your  
institution* involved in course/training delivery

---

Which agencies and/or external partner institutions  
are involved in the provision or delivery of courses?  
(please list here)

---

---

---

---

---

Does your institution have library provision on site?

☐ Yes    ☐ No

Does your institution have an education and training  
plan in place?

☐ Yes (Please include a copy)    ☐ No

Date at which the plan will be in place

---

**In this part of the questionnaire we ask you to give details of courses offered in your institution. The focus of our research is the effect of thinking skills on prisoners, so we are interested in educational courses, offending behaviour courses and vocational and non-vocational courses.**

**1**

**This section is for courses which *in your opinion* contain elements which help to develop or extend prisoners' thinking skills. This section is for courses which in your opinion contain elements which help to develop or extend prisoners' thinking skills.**

Name of course	<u><i>Enhanced Thinking Skills</i></u>	<u><i>WordPower</i></u>
Duration (sessions/weeks) and frequency	<u><i>2 hours/20 weeks</i></u> <u><i>Twice yearly</i></u>	<u><i>2 hours/10 weeks</i></u> <u><i>Six times/year</i></u>
Size of groups	<u><i>10, 12</i></u>	<u><i>10</i></u>
First introduced (date)	<u><i>1998</i></u>	<u><i>1997</i></u>
Total number who have completed course/training	<u><i>90</i></u>	<u><i>300</i></u>
How are places allocated? eg pre-sentence report, basic skills assessment Are certain categories of prisoners excluded?	<u><i>Referral by parole officer</i></u> <u><i>Only for Lifers and DCRs</i></u>	<u><i>Volunteers, balloted</i></u> <u><i>Open to all</i></u>
Delivery internal/external partner institution	<u><i>External</i></u> <u><i>Hartlepool FE College</i></u>	<u><i>Internal</i></u>
What is the emphasis on thinking skills in this course? A, B or C? <i>A: Its primary aim is to develop thinking</i> <i>B: The course aims to develop transferable skills</i> <i>C: Thinking skills are required to deal with the course subject or activities</i>	<u><i>A</i></u>	<u><i>B</i></u>
Outcomes eg certificate, record of achievement	<u></u>	<u><i>Certificate</i></u>

We have given two  
examples (in italics),  
for guidance only

**2****This section is for vocational courses (certificated or not)**

Name of course	_____	_____
Duration (sessions/ weeks) and frequency	_____	_____
Size of groups	_____	_____
First introduced (date)	_____	_____
Total number who have completed course/ training	_____	_____
How are places allocated?	_____	_____
Delivery internal/external partner institution	_____	_____
Outcomes	_____	_____

**3****This section is for non-vocational courses  
(to include arts, therapeutic, recreational)**

Name of course	_____	_____
Duration (sessions/ weeks) and frequency	_____	_____
Size of groups	_____	_____
First introduced (date)	_____	_____
Total number who have completed course/ training	_____	_____
How are places allocated?	_____	_____
Delivery internal/external partner institution	_____	_____
Outcomes	_____	_____



## Bibliography

- Anderson A, Howe C, Soden R, Halliday J and Lowe J (2001). Teaching critical thinking in social care. *Instructional Science*, 29, 1–32.
- Anderson A, Soden R and Hunter S (2001). Evidence evaluation and use in undergraduates' everyday reasoning. *Scottish Education Review*, 33(1), 59–71.
- Anderson T and Soden R (2001). Peer interaction and the learning of critical thinking. *Psychology Learning and Teaching*, 1(1), 34–37.
- Andrews DA, Zinger I, Hoge RD, Bonta J, Gendreau P and Cullen FT (1990). Does correctional treatment work? A clinically relevant and psychologically informed meta-analysis. *Criminology*, 28, 369–404.
- Antonowicz D and Ross RR (1994). Essential components of successful rehabilitation programmes for offenders. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 38, 97–104.
- Audit Scotland (2005). *Scottish Prison Service: correctional opportunities for prisoners*. Edinburgh: Audit Scotland.
- Bassey M (1999). *Case study research in educational settings*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bennett N, Dunne E and Carre C (2000). *Skills development in higher education and employment*. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press.
- Bereiter C (1995). A dispositional view of transfer. In *Teaching for transfer: fostering generalization in learning*, eds A McKeough, J Lupart and A Marini, 21–34. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bereiter C (2002). *Education and mind in the knowledge age*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Butler D (1998). *Promoting self-regulation in the context of academic tasks: the Strategic Content Learning Approach*. Paper presented at the August meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco.
- Cann J, Falshaw L, Nugent F and Friendship C (2003). *Understanding what works: accredited cognitive skills programmes for adult men and young offenders*. Home Office Research Findings No 226. London: Home Office.
- Christie D, Tolmie A, Howe C, Topping K, Thurston A, Jessiman E, Livingston K and Donaldson C (2004). *The impact of collaborative group work in primary classrooms and the effects of class composition in urban and rural schools*. Paper delivered at the 5th Annual Conference of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme, Cardiff, 22–24 November.
- Clarke A, Simmonds R and Wydall S (2004). *Delivering cognitive skills programmes in prison: a qualitative study*. Home Office Research Findings No 242. London: Home Office.
- Cole M and Engestrom Y (1993). A cultural-historical approach to distributed cognition. In *Distributed cognitions: psychological and educational considerations*, ed. G Salomon, 1–46. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- de Bono E (1990). *Lateral thinking: a textbook of creativity*. London: Penguin.

- Detterman DK and Sternberg RJ (eds) (1993). *Transfer on trial: intelligence, cognition and construction*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Falshaw L, Friendship C, Travers R and Nugent F (2003). *Searching for 'what works': an evaluation of cognitive skills programmes*. Home Office Research Findings No 206. London: Home Office.
- Friendship C, Blud L, Erikson M and Travers R (2002). *An evaluation of cognitive behavioural treatment for prisoners*. Home Office Research Findings No 161. London: Home Office.
- Friendship C, Blud L, Erikson M, Travers R and Thornton D (2003). Cognitive-behavioural treatment for imprisoned offenders: an evaluation of HM Prison Service's cognitive skills programmes. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 8, 103–114.
- Haskell RE (2001). *Transfer of learning: cognition, instruction and reasoning*. London: Academic Press.
- Holligan C (1997). Theory in initial teacher education: students' perspectives on its utility – a case study. *British Educational Research Journal*, 23(4), 533–550.
- Hollin C (ed.) (2001). *Handbook of offender assessment and treatment*. Wiley: Chichester.
- Izzo RL and Ross RR (1990). Meta-analysis of rehabilitation programmes for juvenile delinquents: a brief report. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 7, 134–142.
- Keefer MW (1996). Distinguishing practical and theoretical reasoning: a critique of Deanna Kuhn's theory of informal argument. *Informal Logic*, 18(1), 35–55.
- King P (2000). Learning to make reflective judgements. *New directions for teaching and learning*, 82, 15–26.
- King PM and Kitchener KS (1994). *Developing reflective judgment: understanding and promoting intellectual growth and critical thinking in adolescents and adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuhn D (1991). *The skills of argument*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kuhn D (1999). A developmental model of critical thinking. *Educational Researcher*, 28(2), 16–25.
- Lipman M (1991). *Thinking in education*, 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipsey MW (1992). Juvenile delinquency treatment: a meta-analytical inquiry into the variability of effects. In *Meta-analysis for explanation: a casebook*, eds TD Cook, H Cooper, DS Cordray, H Hartmann, LV Hedges, RJ Light, TA Louis and F Mosteller. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Livingston K, Soden R and Kirkwood M (2004). *Post-16 pedagogy and thinking skills: an evaluation*. Final report. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.
- Losel F and Kofert P (1989). Evaluation research on correctional treatment in West Germany: a meta-analysis. In *Criminal behaviour and the justice system: psychological perspectives*, eds NH Wegener, F Losel and J Haison. New York, NY: Springer-Verlag.
- McGuire J (ed.) (1995). *What works: reducing reoffending – guidelines from research and practice*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Moseley DV, Baumfield VM, Elliott J, Gregson H, Higgins SE, Lin M, Miller J, Newton DP and Robson S (2003). *Thinking skill frameworks for post-16 learners: an evaluation*. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre.



- Ogden L (2000). Collaborative tasks, collaborative children: an analysis of reciprocity during peer interaction at Key Stage 1. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26(2), 212–226.
- Perkins D and Grotzer TA (1997). Teaching intelligence. *American Psychologist*, 52(10), 1125–1133.
- Pintrich P (2004). A conceptual framework for assessing motivation and self-regulated learning in college students. *Educational Psychology Review*, 16(4), 385–407.
- Prochaska JO and DiClemente CC (1982). Transtheoretical therapy: toward a more integrative model of change. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 19, 276–288.
- Redondo S, Sanchez-Meca J and Garrido V (1999). The influence of treatment programmes on the recidivism of juvenile and adult offenders: a European meta-analytical review. *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 5, 251–278.
- Resnick LB, Salmon M, Zeitz CM, Wathen SH and Holowchack M (1993). Reasoning in conversation. *Cognition and Instruction*, 11, 347–364.
- Robinson D and Porporino FJ (2001). Programming in cognitive skills: the Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme. In *Handbook of offender assessment and treatment*, ed. C Hollin, 179–193. Chichester: Wiley.
- Ross RR, Fabiano EA and Ewles CD (1988). Reasoning and Rehabilitation. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 32, 29–35.
- St Julien J (1997). Explaining learning: the research trajectory of situated cognition and the implications of connections. In *Situated cognition: social, semiotic and psychological perspectives*, eds D Kirshner and JA Whitson. London: Erlbaum.
- Salomon G and Perkins D (1998). Individual and social aspects of learning. *Review of Research in Education*, 23, 1–24.
- Schwartz BB, Neuman Y, Gil J and Ilya M (2003). Construction of collective and individual knowledge in argumentative activity. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 12(2), 221–258.
- Singley MK and Anderson JR (1989). *The transfer of cognitive skills*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Soden R and Maclellan E (2005). Helping undergraduates to use appropriate criteria for evaluating accounts of motivation. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(4), 445–458.
- Strauss A and Corbin J (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strauss A and Corbin J (1994). Grounded theory methodology: an overview. In *Handbook of qualitative research*, eds N Denzin and Y Lincoln, 262–272. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Whitehead JT and Lab SP (1989). A meta-analysis of juvenile correctional treatment. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 26, 276–295.
- Wilson D (2003). Cognitive skills 'In my own words'. A qualitative evaluation of the programme 'Reasoning and Rehabilitation' in the Scottish Prison Service. Scottish Prison Service Occasional Paper No 2/2003. Edinburgh: Scottish Prison Service.

## Further information

For further information about the issues discussed in this publication please contact:

Information Services  
Learning and Skills Research Centre  
Learning and Skills Development Agency  
Regent Arcade House  
19–25 Argyll Street  
London W1F 7LS

Tel 020 7297 9144  
Fax 020 7297 9242  
[enquiries@LSDA.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@LSDA.org.uk)

This Learning and Skills Development Agency publication results from research commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council.



